Icelandic Fairy and Folktales

Originaly published as

Isländische Märchen und Volkssagen

by Åge Avenstrup
and Elisabeth Treitel
translated by J. Turbes

Icelandic Fairy & Folktales

–Translated from
"Isländische Märchen und Volkssagen"
by Åge Avenstrup & Elisabeth Treitel

Second Edition, November, 2017

© Copyright 2017 by Legacy Information Services, Littleton CO 80127

Originally published as:
"Isländische Märchen und Volkssagen
von Åge Avenstrup und Elisabeth Treitel"
in 1919 by Axel Juncker Verlag, Berlin, Germany

Smashwords Edition License Notes

This ebook is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This ebook may not be re-sold or given away to other people. If you would like to share this book with another person, please purchase an additional copy for each recipient. If you're reading this book and did not purchase it, or it was not purchased for your use only, then please return to Smashwords.com and purchase your own copy. Thank you for respecting the hard work of this author.

Maps included in this edition are based on data from and used in accordance with the terms of use of the National Land Survey of Iceland.

Contents

Translator's Notes

Chapter 1. The Huldre King of Selö (Seley)

Chapter 2. The Maid of the High Meadow

Chapter 3. The Elf Queen

Chapter 4. The Huldre's New Year's Dance

Chapter 5. The Priest's Daughter from Prestbakki

Chapter 6. The Harvest Hand

Chapter 7. Thord of Throstestad (Thrastarstadir)

Chapter 8. The Child's Cradle

Chapter 9. The Changeling of Sogn
Chapter 10. The Little Merman
Chapter 11. The Sea Sprite
Chapter 12. Kort of Mödruvold and the Sea Monster
Chapter 13. Bishop Brynjolf
Chapter 14. The Troll of the Cliffs
Chapter 15. The Giantess of Blaahvam
Chapter 16. Gilitrutt
Chapter 17. The Farmer from Gnupar
Chapter 18. Guldbraa and Skegge
Chapter 19. Jon and the Giantess
Chapter 20. Ketil of Silfrunarstad
Chapter 21. “Trunt, Trunt and the Mountain Trolls!”
Chapter 22. The Night Troll
Chapter 23. The Spirit’s Nightcap
Chapter 24. The Groom and the Ghost
Chapter 25. The Sexton of Mörkaa
Chapter 26. Sigurd and the Ghost
Chapter 27. The Brave Youth
Chapter 28. The Saga of Jon Asmundson
Chapter 29. The Brothers
Chapter 30. Lake Ulf
Chapter 31. Asmund the South Traveler
Chapter 32. The Magicians of the Westman Islands
Chapter 33. The Sending
Chapter 34. The Marriage Devil
Chapter 35. The Red Bull
Chapter 36. The Cask

Chapter 37. The Tailcapped Lady of Hleidrargaard
Chapter 38. The Manskin Shoes
Chapter 39. Tales of Saemund the Wise
1. The Black School
2. How Saemund Escaped from the Black School
3. How Saemund Became Priest at Odda
4. How Saemund Brought In his Hay during Dry Weather
5. How Saemund Took the Devil into his Service
6. How Saemund Perplexed the Devil when He Changed into a Fly
7. The Devil's Flute
8. The Devil as Stableboy
9. How Saemund the Wise broke his Stableboy of Cursing
10. The Devil and the Stupid Lad
11. The Wish Moment
12. Saemund the Wise on his Deathbed
Chapter 40. Sagas of Kalf Arneson
1. How Kalf Misled the Devil
2. Kalf Visits Saemund the Wise
3. How Kalf Sent the Devil for the Priest
4. Kalf's Death
Chapter 41. Gudbjart Floke and the Bishop of Holar
Chapter 42. The Woman from Málmey
Chapter 43. Sagas of Erik the Priest of Vogsosar
1. The Beggar Woman
2. The Face in the Mound
3. The Horse Theft
4. Erik and the Farmer
5. Erik and the Old Woman

6. Erik and the Bishop
7. How Erik Brought Back the Farmer's Wife
8. How Erik Rescued the Farmer's Wife from the Huldre Folk
9. Priest Erik's Death
Chapter 44. The Man from Grimsey and the Bear
Chapter 45. The Bear that Wrestled with The Barrel
Chapter 46. How the Seal Came to Be
Chapter 47. The Sealskin
Chapter 48. The Lindworm in the Lagarfljót
Chapter 49. The Thankful Raven
Chapter 50. Asmund and Signe
Chapter 51. The Two Ash Trees
Chapter 52. The Glowing Key
Chapter 53. What Happened to Jon's Soul
Appendix A. Bibliography
Appendix B. Variation on Saemund the Wise's Escape from the Black School
Appendix C. The Elf Cross

Translator's Notes

These Icelandic stories, originally published as "Isländische Märchen und Volkssagen" in German, are available from various sources including the Internet, but to the best of my knowledge not as a single body in English. My hope in translating these works is to provide the interested reader of English with the means to enjoy these tales, which might otherwise go unnoticed. It would be inappropriate to overlook the extensive collection of Icelandic tales and legends in Jacqueline Simpson's English compilation, "Icelandic Folk Tales and Legends" (California Press, 1972 and The History Press, 2004) in which a number of these stories are also contained.

As a hopeful aid to explain points that the reader may not understand I have added occasional explanations as well as footnotes. My translator's

notes also contain some references and links to other information sources. Notes not labeled “translator’s notes” are those of the original authors.

Where appropriate, I have included simple maps to orient the reader to locations within Iceland where these tales are placed. Many of those places are private residences; if the reader has the good fortune to visit Iceland and seeks out such locations, please regard them as private and respect the privacy of the residents.

Many of these tales deal with a long-standing Norse/Icelandic traditional belief in huldrefolk, or “hidden people”. Unlike the more commonly known trolls, the huldre people were sometimes small fairy beings or the size of normal people, as some of these stories portray them.

Tales of the huldres’ origin vary; one says they are “the hidden children of Eve” and descend from those of Eve’s children who, when God came to visit, were unwashed and so hidden by Eve in shame. God then punishes Eve – and with what seems unjust but Godlike wrath – by declaring that the children and their progeny be forevermore hidden from normal people.

The huldre are sometimes interchanged with elves (from the Norse álfr), which like the huldre were thought to have supernatural powers. In “The Good People: New Fairylore Essays” (©Garland Publishing, 1991) Alan Bruford relates that both terms, elves and huldre, were used interchangeably in 19th century Iceland[1].

There is a quick summary of the huldre (also huldur, huldu, holder) under “Huldra” in the Internet Wikipedia resource[2], which notes that the Icelandic belief still holds today where highways are built to detour around locations believed to be dwelling places of the huldrefolk[3].

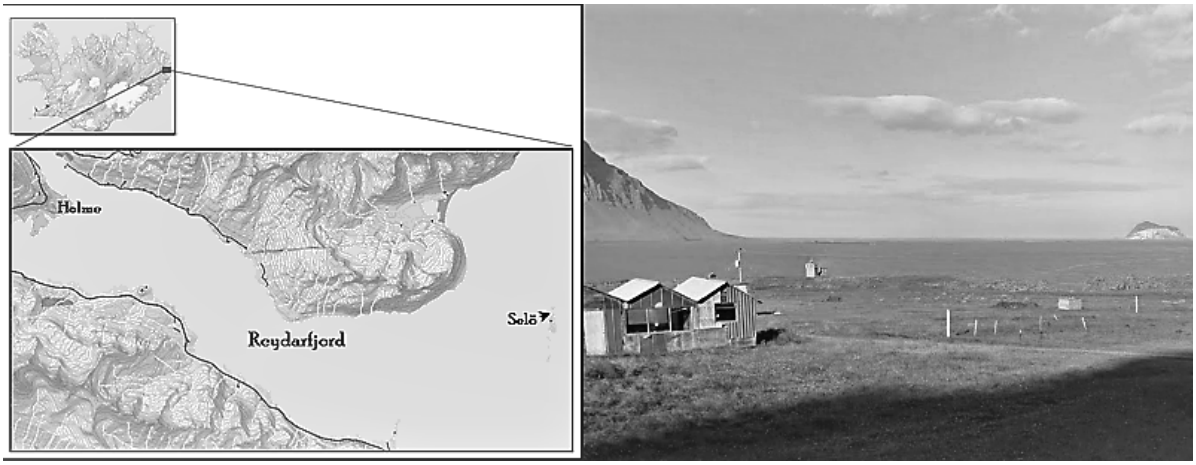
J. Turbes

1. “Trolls, Hillfolk, Finns and Picts: The Identity of the Good Neighbors in Orkney and Shetland” (A. Bruford), p. 118. Click on or enter the googlebooks link https://goo.gl/M8biHx .

2. See the wikipedia entry for the hidden/huldrefolk at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Huldra.

3. "Elves in Modern-Day Iceland"; Rolf Soderlind (from Reuters News Service Iceland, http://www.ismennt.is/vefir/ari/alfar/alandslag/aelvesmod.htm)

Chapter 1. The Huldre King of Selö (Seley)



Selö (Seley Island) map and view from south Reydarfjord (center, right)

One summer, as in every year, a group of people was fishing at Seley Island (Selö) in Reydarfjord. As the dried fish were being brought back to land, it happened that a large portion of the fish belonging to the priest of Holme remained behind in the fishermen’s shack.

The weather then worsened to the extent that no one was able to return to the fish until the sea weather again bettered in the fall. At that time, they returned to claim the fish and immediately began to carry the fish from the shack to the boat.

The boatmen said that they would like to go to the other side of the island to see if anything worthwhile had been driven ashore, as beached whales and drift timber were highly valued. One of them, a young boy, then stated that he was ready and so departed while the others continued carrying the load into the boat.

Suddenly the sea rose with such force that they were only able at great risk to complete loading the fish. They then all went on board and waited a while for the absent boy, but when he returned they found it impossible to take him aboard because of the strong surf.

They called to him and told him he must remain there, but that they would return for him the following day when sailing weather was better, clearly thinking it best to care for their own lives and steer for the mainland, leaving him temporarily helpless behind.

Freezing mist and still air soon set in and so the young man went to the fishing shack. Not knowing of any way out, he remained there until evening. He gradually lost hope and thought it better to take his own life rather than to starve, so he left the shack. It was then that he saw a friendly light but believed that in this cloud-darkened night it could hardly be a heavenly star. Looking more closely, he saw that it resembled a light in a window.

He walked a short while toward the light until he came to a house so grand that it resembled a royal hall. Listening near the door, he heard someone say, “Yes, dear girl, it is none other than the unlucky man who today was left behind on the island and who has come to the house. Go and ask him in. I do not want him dying on my door.”

Immediately, a young girl came to the door and opened it. She invited him in, telling him that he should take off his snowy clothes. She then led him up a high stairway and into a very beautiful hall decorated with gold and jewels. There he saw many women, one of which was the most beautiful of all. He greeted her politely, and she returned his greeting.

The same young maiden then stood up and led him to a small but handsome room, set wine and food before him and left. It is not told where he was to sleep that evening, so the night passed. But the next morning the same young maiden came to him and said that while she was unable to remain for his amusement but she otherwise gave him everything needed to pass the time.

And so the winter passed until Christmas. On Christmas Eve, the young maiden came to him and said that if he believed she had shown him any kindness, he could repay her by granting her a wish and not refusing it. Specifically, on the next day while an amusement of dancing was being held and her father would call for her, he should not give in to curiosity and look out the window. She then would bring him enough with which to amuse himself. He promised her not to be curious.

On the first Christmas day, she brought him wine and all that would serve to satisfy his hunger. She then said goodbye and went on her way. Shortly afterward, he heard singing and the sounds of strings playing. He thought to himself what great joy there was, and it certainly could do no harm if he peeked out; if he were cautious, no one would have to know. So he climbed high up the wall to be able to see the dancing, and as he looked out he saw a crowd of people. Some were dancing while others played stringed music, and in the midst of the crowd he saw a regal-looking man sitting with a crown on his head with a woman at each side.

He thought to himself that these must be the queen and the king’s daughter; the latter however recognized him. He dared not risk looking out any longer and went away from the window. The dancing lasted into the evening. When the young maiden came to him again, contrary to her usual manner she was quiet, but she did say to him that he held poorly to his promise to not look out the window although she had managed to arrange things so that her father had not noticed this time.

New Years then approached, and on New Year’s Eve the young maiden again came to him and said that she had again been summoned by her father and would again be going to the holiday dance. Sterny she told him that he must keep better to his promise to her than he had at Christmas not to be curious. This he promised in all that was holy to do, swearing that this time he would not look out. She accepted his promise, left and returned to him with wine and food, sharing her company with him to pass the time. Then she left.

When the next day came, he heard even more noise and joy than at Christmas. Still, he said to himself that he would not look out and that it would likely be just as at Christmas. Much of the day then passed while he sat quietly. But then the curiosity began to torture him as he experienced so little of the great joy. So again he spied outside and saw that the dancing was much more entertaining than before. This time there were many knights in brilliantly shining garb dancing before the queen and king.

He quickly pulled back from the window, but believed that no one had glanced.his way. The festivities continued until the evening when the young maid again came to him. She was quite angry and accused him of deceiving her once again. Nonetheless, this did not dull their relationship, and she favored him with her affections as before.

The winter passed and Easter approached. On Easter Eve the young maiden came to him, speaking in a friendly manner and once more asking him to not be curious the next day, even if he hears that there might be much joy. If her father were to notice that she had a male companion, it could cost her her life.

On Easter morning, she came to him and brought him everything that he could wish for, then bid him farewell and left. The celebrating began again as before. As the day went on the loneliness began to bore him, so he left his room for the adjoining one thinking that the maiden would not notice if he peeked out from there. He looked out for a moment and saw the same scene as at New Years.

He then returned to his room and remained there until the maiden came in that evening. She was indignant with him, saying that he had again let her down as before. She did not know if her father had gotten wind of his presence, but her father had been cooler with her than usual This, she had not expected, and she also had not expected her guest to be so untrustworthy, saying that he would probably be so in other matters to come as well.

Spring approached, and on the last winter evening the young maiden came again to him and said that tomorrow would be the first summerlike day, that people from the mainland would be coming to get him and that he should go early to the fishing shack. She then asked him for one more favor if he valued her keeping him alive during the winter—to acknowledge fathering the child that she now bore, for it could mean her life since if she was unable to proclaim the child's father then her own father would put her to death.

But if she could name the father, then she would be spared. So she wished now for nothing more than that he remain faithful to her in this matter. This he promised, saying it would never happen that he would deny being the child’s father as it was no burden to him and would be no imposition.

He then bid her goodbye, thanking her for all of her care given him during the winter. Early the next morning he went on his way, but when he had gone only a short distance, he wished once more to see the hall. Looking back, he was surprised to see only stony hillocks and cliffs on the south side of the island. So he continued on to the fishermen’s shack.

The weather was mild and the sea calm, and as the day passed, he saw a boat coming from the mainland. But as the boatsmen came to the island and he went to meet them, they withdrew in fear; he had grown heavy and fat, so they believed him to be a ghost. They of course thought only that he had died during the winter, so no one risked speaking to him much less to ask him if he wished to come back to the mainland.

Finally, however, the boat captain stepped on shore and asked him if he was really a living person or a ghost and if he was the same man who had remained on the island in the fall. He said that he was that same man they had left behind. The captain said that he could not understand how he could have survived without food. The island man said that the seaweed on Selö was no less nutritious than the gruel on the mainland at Holme.

Without wishing to tell more, the young man boarded the boat and they brought him to Holme. Most were astounded to see him return alive and many

posed questions about how he had survived the winter. But none learned any more from him than what those had learned on the island.

Time passed, and one Sunday late that summer the weather was pleasant so many came to church. Also on this day, the boy also wished to attend. As the priest and the whole congregation went into the church, they saw a child's cradle suddenly appear next to the altar. A quilt embroidered with gold covered the child inside. No one accompanied the cradle; only an unseen woman's pretty hand grasped the edge.

Everyone was astounded by this and they all looked at each other. The priest spoke, saying that the child should be baptized and that it would not be farfetched that someone in the congregation was related to the child, most likely the boy and that he had left the child on Selö in the spring. The priest then said that he would baptize the child with the name of the boy, although the latter repeatedly denied having anything to do with the child.

The priest replied that the child certainly could not have lived on the island without help, but the boy again said that he would not acknowledge the child, forbidding the priest to baptize it in his name.

But then the cradle was suddenly taken away and disappeared. At the same time was heard a strong crying that gradually left the church. They all then heard as the crying and sobbing slowly disappeared toward the sea. The only thing remaining was the gold-embroidered quilt left lying on the floor of the church where it was used long thereafter in Holme.

Everyone wondered about the event, but it affected the priest most strongly. The boy later fell into a deep melancholy. The priest asked him why, and the boy then told everything that had occurred in the winter as he lived with the king and his daughter. He said that he would regret his whole life long that he had not accepted the child. From this day on, he was never the same.

And with that ends the story of the Huldre King of Selö.

Chapter 2. The Maid of The High Meadow

A priest who lived in the northlands had raised a young maid as stepdaughter. The priest had a meadow farm high amongst the mountains where he liked to send his cattle and sheep where they were cared for by the young maid and a shepherd.

When the maid was older, she headed the meadow farm and fulfilled those duties as well as she had all others. She was a clever housekeeper, pretty to look at and with a mastery of many things. In this region of the land, there was none to equal her, and so many wealthy men sought her hand, but she rejected them all.

The priest once spoke with the young maid, advising her to marry because he was now an old man and could not always be there for her. But she would hear none of it; her feelings were remote from such things. She said that she was quite happy with things as they were, and that not everyone finds their happiness in marriage. So for the time being there was no further talk of the matter.

When a part of the winter had passed, it began to appear to people that the maid was becoming somewhat round below her belt. The closer it came to spring, the rounder she became. In early spring, her caregiver spoke again with her asking her to be open and honest with him about her condition. He thought that she must certainly be expecting a child and so it would be best for her not to go to the high meadow farm this summer.

But she said that she was not with child, was fine and would perform her tasks at the high meadow this summer just as she did before. The priest saw that he would not be able to get her to confide in him and so gave in to her will. Nonetheless, he ordered the men who accompanied her to the high meadow not to leave her alone, and this they promised faithfully to obey.

Once again, at the high meadow farm the maid was cheerful and happy. Time passed uneventfully with the men watching her closely and never leaving her alone.

Then one evening it happened that the shepherd could not find the sheep or cattle. Everyone who was able had to leave the meadow to search, and only the maid stayed behind alone. The people’s searching went slowly, and

soon thick fog settled in so that only during the following morning were the livestock found.

When they returned to the farmhouse, the maid was already up, unusually agile and light on her feet. As time passed, they also saw that she was no longer as portly as before but knew not how that had come about. They also found that she was no longer plump in the manner of a woman expecting a child.

When fall came, they returned home from the meadow, man and beast, and the priest then saw that the maid was slimmer than she had the previous winter. He belabored the other meadow people, asking if they had gone against his orders and had left the maid alone. They told him what had happened, that they had only once left to find the missing livestock. The priest was upset, wishing them all misfortune because they had gone against his orders. Besides, he had suspected something of the sort when the maid left for the high meadow.

The next winter, a man came wishing to court the priest‘s stepdaughter. She, however, wanted nothing to do with such courting. The priest however said that nothing should prevent her from marrying the man, and everyone agreed, praising him and saying that he came from a good family. In the past year he had taken over his father’s farm and was responsible for his mother’s care.

The proposal was accepted, whether or not the maid wished it. The wedding was in the spring, but before the bride had donned her wedding dress, she told her betrothed, “As you marry me against my will, I want you to promise me something: that you will never take a winter boarder without telling me beforehand; otherwise, you will suffer!” This, he promised.

The wedding was celebrated and she moved in with her lord, taking over the household. But this she did with little enthusiasm; she was never happy and she always bore a grim expression even though her husband waited on her hand and foot and gave her every comfort.

Every summer she stayed at home while the others were busy with haymaking in the fields. Her mother-in-law was always with her, trying to cheer her up and helping her with her duties. Sometimes she sat and sewed or spun while the old woman told tales to entertain her daughter-in-law.

Once, when the old woman was finished with her stories she said to her daughter-in-law that she should now tell some stories. But the young woman replied that she knew no stories. Still, the old woman insisted and so the young woman promised to tell the only tale she knew. And so she began as follows:

“There once lived a maid on a high meadow farm. Near the meadow were large cliffs that she often passed. Within the cliffs lived a handsome huldre youth whom she soon came to know. He was so kind and loving to the maid that he never denied her wishes and always met her every wish.

“The result was that after a time the maid expected a child. When the next summer approached and time came for her to return to the meadow, her employer insisted on knowing if she was with child. But she denied this, and left again for the high meadow, as was her normal manner.

“But her employer ordered those who were with the maid never to leave her alone, which they promised him never to do. Nevertheless, they did leave her one time to search for the livestock and it was then that she felt the labor pains of childbirth. Her lover came to her, sat by her and helped her with the birth. He washed and swaddled the child.

“Before he left with the child, he let the maid drink from a glass. It was the sweetest of drinks that I ever…” – and here the needles with which she was knitting fell from her hands. She bent down for them and recovered her composure – “… that she had ever tasted, I meant to say, and she was then healthy and free of any ill effects.

“After that time, the maid and the huldre youth never saw each other again. The maid was married to another man against her will, but her heart was always with her first love. From that time, on, she never had a happy day. And with that, the tale ends.”

The old woman thanked her for the story, keeping it in mind. The time passed uneventfully. The young woman went about her life, carrying her cares with her, but always good and loving to her lord and master.

One summer when the hay harvest was well under way, two men came to the farm, one large and another somewhat smaller, approaching the lord in his field. They both wore wide-brimmed hats so that one could only dimly see their faces. The larger man spoke first, asking the farmer for

shelter for the winter. The farmer answered that he could not take anyone in without first discussing the matter with his wife.

The man asked him to not speak so awkwardly as though he were hiding behind his wife and could not decide for himself such a small matter as that of taking in two people for the winter. The result then was, the farmer promised them a place for the winter without first asking his wife.

That evening, the strangers came with the farmer to the house where he granted them entry and asked them to wait. He then went to his wife and told her the state of things. His wife was very unwilling and said that it had been her first wish and most probably the last. So now that he had taken them in by himself, whatever happened during their winter's stay was his affair. After this, there was no more discussion of the matter.

Everything was then peaceful until the fall when the married pair wanted to attend communion. It was then the custom, as it is still in various parts of Iceland that those who want to sit at the Lord's Table first go to each person in their farm, kiss them and ask for their forgiveness of any offenses. The wife had avoided the winter guests until this day, not letting herself be seen. Also, even now she did not go to them to say good-bye.

The couple left. When they were outside the fence of the farm, the farmer asked his young wife, "Did you wish our winter guests well?" She answered, "No." He asked her not to be so godless and to leave without first bidding them well.

"In most things you show that you pay me little heed, first in that you took in these men without asking me, and now that you will force me to kiss them. Nonetheless, I'll obey you. But you must accept the consequences by yourself because it means my life and with all probability, yours too."

She then turned back to the house, and because it took so long without her returning the farmer also returned to where he expected to find his winter guests, finding them in their room. Here, he found how the larger guest had embraced his wife, and was lying with her on the floor, both having died from hearts broken from sorrow. The other guest stood crying next to them when the farmer entered but immediately afterward, he vanished without anyone knowing where he went.

But now everyone knew what the the tale was that the wife had told her mother-in-law: that the larger guest was the huldre man that she had met at the high meadow and the one who had vanished was her son.

Chapter 3. The Elf Queen

A farmer lived on a farm high up between the mountains, but nowhere is it told who he was or what the farm was called. He was unmarried but had a housemistress named Hildur whose lineage was unknown. She was in charge of the household and was adept at everything.

The farmhands loved her as did the farmer himself, but there was no sign that their relationship crossed the border of propriety. She was a sober woman, introverted but of a friendly manner.

The farmer’s domestic situation was very good, except that he found it difficult to find a shepherd. But he was a wealthy sheep farmer and so he felt that his manor lacked a cornerstone without a shepherd. This lack was not due to his being strict with his herders or for any lack of what Hildur needed. The reason that the farmer and shepherds could not come to terms was that the shepherds never became old in the farmer’s service; on their first Christmas Day, they died in their beds.

In those times it was the custom throughout the land to hold religious services on Christmas Eve and was also considered festive to attend church both then as well as on the holiday itself. But on mountain farms far from churches it was no small matter for those whose chores prevented them from getting ready sooner to leave home until the morning hours to attend services. On these farms it was common that the herders for these farmers did not return home early.

Although it was the custom, there was little need to watch over the farm as was normally done on both Christmas Eve and Day while the others were at church; since Hildur came to the farm she had constantly offered to watch over the farm while at the same time attended to whatever needed to be arranged for the holiday celebration – cooking and everything else that belonged to the festivities. She also watched over the farm until late into the night until the worshippers had returned, gone to bed and were asleep before going to bed herself.

When it went on for some time that the farmer’s shepherds all died on Christmas Eve, people in the area began to talk; as a result, the farmer found it difficult to engage someone. The more they died, the harder finding someone became. Since that all died without visible wounds, no suspicions fell on either the farmer or his servants. Finally, the farmer said that he

could not bring his conscience to employ shepherds who must expect certain death; now it was up to fate to decide what would become of his herds and his wealth.

No sooner had the farmer made this decision and was firmly resolved not to employ anyone for the purpose than a strong and able man came to him and offered his services. The farmer said, “I'm not in such need of your services I must employ you.” The stranger said, “Have you engaged a shepherd for the coming winter?”

The farmer answered, “No,” saying that because of the consequences he had resolved not to employ anyone, “…and you have probably heard how unlucky my shepherds have been.” "I have heard of it,” said the stranger, “but their fate doesn’t frighten me.” He was so forceful that the farmer gave in, taking the sheepherder into his service.

Time passed and the farmer and shepherd were very happy with each other, which everzone welcomed since the man was well mannered, bold and strong of character. Nothing happened until Christmas came, and things occurred as always. The farmer went with his people to church on Christmas Eve, and only the housemistress Hildur stayed behind while the shepherd remained with the livestock. The farmer left the two alone at home.

Evening approached before the shepherd came to the house, as usual. He ate his gruel and then went to bed. He realized that should something happen, perhaps it would be safer for him to stay awake rather than go to sleep. So although he had no fear, he laid awake.

When a better part of the night had passed, he heard the churchgoers returning. They had a bite to eat and then went to bed. Still, he noticed nothing but believed that they all were asleep. He felt that his strength was leaving him but thought quite normal since he was tired from the day’s efforts.

But he began to think that it would be bad for him if sleep overcame him, and so he called on all of his willpower to stay awake. And so it went for a long time until he heard someone approach his bed. Believing he saw the housemistress Hildur up to some mischief, he pretended to be fast asleep and then felt it as she put something in his mouth.

What he felt was a witch’s bridle, but he quietly let himself be harnessed. When she had finished putting the harness on his head, she arranged the reins most comfortably for herself then climbed upon his back. She then rode him in great haste until they came to what to him seemed a cleft or crack in the earth. Here she jumped down from his back onto a rock, letting the reins hang. Then, before his eyes, she disappeared into the opening.

The shepherd found it bad and unexplainable that Hildur disappeared in this way without his knowing what became of her; but he found that wearing the harness he was unable to go far, as it held much magical power. So he found an escape by rubbing his head on the stone until he had worn away the harness, letting it lie where it fell. He then threw himself into the cleft where she had sprung before him.

It seemed to him that he had not gone far down into the hole until he again saw Hildur. She had reached a pretty meadow and had soon crossed it. After all this, he knew that things with Hildur were not all they seemed and that she hid more tricks than what people saw of her above in the light of day.

He also knew that she would soon see him if he went after her through the meadow. So he took a stone from his pocket that made him invisible and holding it in his left hand, he followed behind her as quickly as he could. When he had gone further through the meadow, he saw a large, stately hall and that Hildur was following the path leading to it.

He then saw a large crowed of people coming from the hall to meet her, and in front of them came a man who was dressed more impressively than the others. It seemed to the shepherd that he was greeting his wife when Hildur arrived, bidding her welcome. The others following the leader greeted her as their queen. Beside the leader came two half-grown children who with unrestrained joy greeted her as their mother.

When the crowd had paid their homage to their queen, they accompanied her and her king into the hall where they prepared a stately reception for her. They clothed her in queenly garments and placed a golden bracelet ring on her arm.

Still unseen, the shepherd followed the crowd into the hall but stayed where there were few people so as to see what was happening. From here,

he saw so much splendor and beauty the likes of which he had never seen. Tables were brought forth and set and he marveled at the grandeur.

After a while, he saw Hildur enter the hall clothed in stately garb as already told. Each person was directed to his or her place. Queen Hildur took the place of honor next to the king while the whole following took their places on each side.

The meal lasted quite a while, after which the tables were removed and the men and young maidens who chose to stepped forward to dance while others chose other forms of entertainment more to their liking. The king and queen, however, sat and talked with each other and the shepherd saw that their talk was mixed with both joy and sadness.

During the king and queen's conversation, three children younger than those mentioned before came to them and spoke of their joy at seeing their mother again. Queen Hildur returned their greeting lovingly and took the youngest child onto her lap, stroking it although it seemed in poor spirits and very restless. The queen then let the child down, removed a ring from her finger and gave it to the child to play with.

The child played for a while with the gold ring but then lost the ring on the floor. The shepherd, standing nearby, moved quickly to seize the ring as it fell and and hid it on his invisible person before anyone noticed. Everyone immediately began looking for it and thought it strange that the ring was nowhere to be found.

When a better part of the evening had passed, Queen Hildur began preparing to leave. Everyone in the hall asked her to stay longer and became quite sad as they saw that she would be leaving. The shepherd noticed that at one place in the hall sat a very old woman who was quite ugly to look at. She was the only one who had neither welcomed Queen Hildur's arrival nor encouraged her to stay.

When the king saw that neither his wishes nor those of the others could stop Queen Hildur's wanderlust, he went to the woman and said, "Take your curses back, mother, and heed my wishes so that my queen no longer must be away and my joy at our being together must be so short as it now is." The old woman replied with anger, "All of my curses will remain, and nothing will move me to take them back."

The king said nothing, returning sorrowfully to his queen, placing his arm around her and kissing her while asking her once again in soft tones not to leave. The queen replied that his mother's curses forbid her to do otherwise, saying that it was unlikely that they could see each other more often because of the fate imposed on her and that the many deaths she had caused would not remain hidden much longer. As a result, she must suffer the well-earned punishment for her acts even if she did them unwillingly.

As she was speaking, the shepherd left the hall when he saw how things were. He crossed the meadow to the cleft where they had entered and climbed back out. He then hid his magic stone, put on the harness and waited until Hildur returned. After a time, Queen Hildur returned alone and in sad spirits. She again climbed upon his back and rode back to the farmhouse.

When they arrived, she led him back to his bed, removed the harness, went to bed herself and fell asleep. Although the shepherd was clearly awake the whole time, he acted as though he was asleep so that Hildur noticed nothing. When she was finally in bed, he made no further effort to be cautious and fell into a deep sleep. As expected, he slept well into the next day.

The next morning, the farmer arose before everyone else on the farm; it concerned him and he wanted to see his shepherd, expecting instead of Christmas joy the grief of finding him dead in his bed as had always happened before.

While the farmer dressed, the others awoke and also dressed themselves while the farmer went to the shepherd's bed and with his hand shook him. He noticed that he was still alive and was happy about it, praising God in high tones for this mercy. The shepherd awoke, fresh and cheerful, and dressed himself while the farmer asked him if anything new had happened during the night. The shepherd replied, "No, but I had a very strange dream."

"What was it?" asked the farmer. The shepherd then told of things from the moment when Hildur had come to his bed and harnessed him, repeating every event and word exactly as he remembered it. When he finished his story, they all sat quietly except for Hildur, who said, "Everything you've told is a lie unless you have proof that it happened as you have told."

But the shepherd wasn’t put off by this and instead reached into his pocket and took out the ring that he had caught in the hall of the elves. He then said, “While I do not feel it my duty to show signs to prove my dream, it is a matter of luck to have clear evidence that I was this night with the huldre. Or is this not your ring, Queen Hildur?”

“It is!” she cried. “And God bless you for freeing me from this slavery into which my mother-in-law placed me! Only unwillingly did I commit the evil deeds that she ordered me to do.” With that, Queen Hildur began to tell her story.

“I was a huldre maiden from a poor family. Still, he who is now the elf king fell in love with me and, although it was against his mother’s will, took me as his wife.

“My mother-in-law became so angry that she promised her son that he would only have the joy of my presence for a short time. She would grant us being together occasionally, but upon me she placed the curse of being a slave amongst people and adding to that, I had the unhappiness of having to murder a person at Christmas.

“This person, while I slept, I must harness and ride in the same way as I have done in this night to the shepherd, to visit my king. This evil would have continued and he would have been murdered if I had not found such a strong and courageous man who risked following me to the home of the elves and could prove he had been there and seen how the people there live.

“It is now clear that the farmer’s former shepherds found death due to me since I first came here, but I hope that you will not hold against me what I did against my will. Until now, no one has found that way below ground and through curiosity made their way to the land of the huldres until this courageous man. He has freed me from my slavery and the curse, and I will reward him even though not immediately. For now, however, I cannot remain here any longer. Please accept my thanks for the goodness you have shown me, but my yearning draws me back home.”

After speaking, Queen Hildur disappeared and was never again seen amongst people.

Of the shepherd, people say that he married and the following spring founded his own farm. This he could well do since the farmer was quite generous when he left his service, and he himself was not without means.

He was highly thought of in the land, and everyone sought his advice and help. In fact, he was so well liked and happy that people could not believe how well things went for him and sometimes thought that his livestock had nine lives.

But he simply said that he had Queen Hildur to thank for his wealth.

Chapter 4. The Huldre’s New Year’s Dance

Two brothers were arguing about whether or not there are really Huldre folk. One insisted that they existed while the other argued decidedly not. This went on for some time until the brother who said the Huldre people did not exist became extremely angry and said that he would leave and not return until he knew whether the Huldre people existed or not. He wandered over mountain and unpopulated areas, hills and valleys but was none the wiser.

There is no more to tell of his journey until one New Year’s Eve. Then, he came to a farm where the people were very sad. The traveler was talkative and asked what it was that made them so sad. The reason, he was told, was that no one was willing to remain to protect the farm while the others attended church service. They felt it necessary to do so since for some time on New Year’s Eve the one who remained behind had disappeared. For this reason, no one wished to remain because whoever did so expected death.

The traveler told the people not to fear from such superstitious talk and offered to protect the farm. This removed a stone from the hearts of the people, but nonetheless they felt fear and dread at what might happen.

When the people of the farm had ridden away to church, he began loosening a board from the inner wall above the first bed in the living/sleeping area. He then crept between the outer and inner walls, pulling the board back into place but leaving a small space through which he could see the whole room. A dog that was with him lay on the floor of the room.

A short while later after he had taken his place, he heard the noise of peoples’ voices and footsteps outside. He then heard a crowd of people coming into the living area. He saw how the dog was seized and thrown to the floor with deadly force, breaking every bone in its body. He then heard the ivoices of the newcomers saying that it smelled of people on the farm. Other voices said that it was not surprising since the people had just left for church.

After the newcomers had looked about the house, the traveler who watched from hiding saw that the newcomers placed a table in the living area and covered it with a tablecloth embroidered with gold. They then set

the table with precious tableware matching the tablecloth: bowls, plates, drinking goblets and knives that were all made of silver. They then sat down at the table and proceeded with great formality.

They then placed a boy as guard at the door whose task it was to watch for daybreak; he was at times outside and then inside. The traveler noticed that each time the boy came inside someone asked what time it was, to which he always answered that it was a long time until daylight.

Now the traveler began slowly to free himself somewhat from the wall so that he could quickly come out if needed. When the strangers had eaten their fill, the traveler watched as one of the party led a man and a woman forth. He then saw as a man appearing to be a priest approached them. Everyone then began to sing the usual marriage psalm and the ceremony proceeded in the usual good Christian custom.

When the wedding ended, dancing began and the celebration continued for some time. When they had danced for a good while, the watchboy came in again. Once again someone asked if there was much of the night remaining and he answered that there was still the sixth portion remaining.

But the traveler, who had in the meantime crept from his place and now stood hidden behind the watchboy, cried, “You are lying, because the sun stands right now high in the sky!” Over this, the huldre people were so upset that they immediately began beating the watch boy. In the meantime, the traveler had again crept back inside the wall.

Once the huldre people had beaten all life from the watch boy, they ran out as quickly as they could like lambs into a sheep’s shed, leaving all of their things behind. When the traveler saw this, he followed them at a distance. The last he saw of the huldre folk was as they jumped into a lake near the farm. He then returned to the house and collected everything, including the leftover food and the valuable table setting.

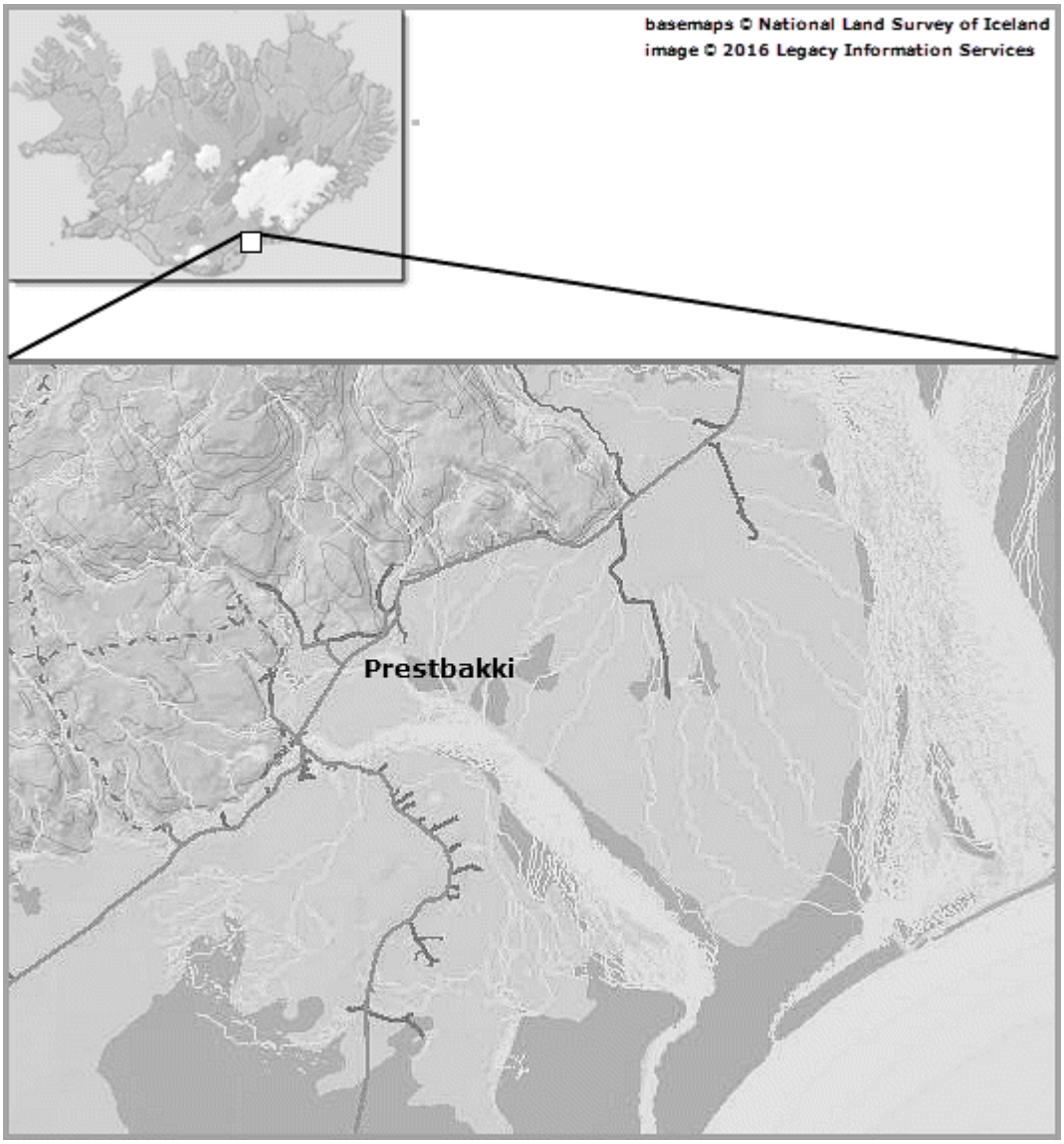
Shortly thereafter, the farm people returned from church back home. They were overjoyed to see the man who had guarded the farm and asked him if he had seen anything. He answered that it was nothing special and then told everything that had happened. From this, it was clear to the people that the previous watchpeople must have shown themselves at their peril and exactly the same fate had befallen them as had that of the poor dog.

The farm people thanked the traveler for protecting the farm with many kind words, praising his courage and giving him everything that the huldre folk had left behind, which was almost more than he could carry.

The traveler returned home and met his brother. He told him everything, saying at the same time that he would never argue that there was no huldre folk. He later took over his parent’s farm, married and had good fortune in all of his life’s endeavors. All who knew him thought him a worthy man, ambitious, and a source of good counsel to those in difficulty.

As for the farm he had guarded in that night, no one ever again vanished on New Year’s Eve.

Chapter 5. The Priest’s Daughter from Prestbakki



At Prestbakki in the Skaftafell region there once lived a parish priest named Einar. He was a rich man with many children. He held a great distaste for huldre stories and said that the huldrefolk had never lived. He demanded that they visit him and bragged wryly that they probably could not find him.

One night he dreamt that a man walked on his bed and said, “From now on, you will not be able to deny that there are huldre, because I will now

take your oldest daughter and you will never see her again. You have angered us huldre often enough.”

The next morning, the priest’s oldest daughter who was then twelve, was gone. They looked for her everywhere but she was nowhere to be found. Later, while her little siblings were playing in the meadow she came to them and played with them. She wanted very much to come home with them but that she was gone forever. She told her siblings that the people there where she now was were good to her, and that she could not have things better. Her father dreamt of her often, where she told him the same that she had told her siblings and that added to that, the son of the priest of the huldre people was to be her husband.

And so it went for some time until she once came to her father in his dream and said that she wished to have him as guest the next day, as it was to be her wedding day.

From that day, on, he never dreamt of her again.

Chapter 6. The Harvest Hand

A young man once rode from the southland regions to the northland to work as a hand in the harvest. When he had ridden northward to the meadows, a thick fog engulfed him and he lost his way. Soon there came wind-driven snow and cold. He stopped and pitched a tent. As he took out his travel rations and began to eat, a bedraggled and starving red hound crept into his tent.

The southerner wondered how a hound would come to him in a place where he hardly expected to see any animal. The hound was so ugly and unusual that he became afraid; nonetheless, he gave the hound as much to eat as it wished. The hound ate ravenously, then left and disappeared outside in the fog.

The man gave no further thought to the hound, and when he had finished his own meal, he lay down to sleep, his head on his saddle. He soon was asleep and dreamt that a woman came to him in his tent.

The woman appeared tall, slender and somewhat elderly. She said, “I thank you, young man, on behalf of my daughter. However, it is not within my power to reward you as you have earned. Still, I want you to take this old scythe that I am placing beneath your saddle. I hope you will find it useful and that it cuts well whatever it meets. But never lay it to glow in fire, for then it will do nothing. But if you find it necessary, you can sharpen it on a stone.” With that, the woman disappeared.

The boy awoke from his sleep and saw that the fog had cleared, and that it was now a clear day. The sun was high in the sky. His first task was to gather his horses and then to prepare to leave. He bound up his tent, packing it on a horse. But as he took his saddle from the ground, he found beneath it a worn scythe covered with rust spots. Remembering the dream, he stowed the scythe, traveled on and all was well.

He soon found his way again and so traveled as fast as he could to a place where people lived. But as he came to the northland, no one would hire him. Everyone had already hired people for the harvest and a week of the harvest was already over.

Then he heard of a woman who lived in the area who still had no harvest hand. She was rich in goods and people believed she was very capable. She

rarely hired harvest hands, and she never started to cut hay earlier than a week or even 14 days after everyone else. Still, she usually finished harvesting her home field just as quickly as the rest.

If she did occasionally hire a hand, she kept him no longer than a week and she didn't pay him. The people sent the southerner to her after telling him how she was. As he was unable to find work anywhere else, he went to her and offered to cut hay for her.

She took him on, telling him that she would allow him to stay for a week. "But I will not pay you," she said, "except if you can cut so much hay in a week that I am unable to rake it together on Saturday." That seemed to him to be a good condition, and so he began to cut the hay.

He took the scythe, the gift from the huldre woman, and found that it cut well. He never had to hone it and so he was able to cut continuously for five days. He enjoyed his work and the woman was very friendly to him. Once, he came to the forge where he saw an uncountable number of scythe handles and rakes near a big pile of scythes. He wondered about this, finding that the woman had no lack of harvest tools.

On that week's Friday evening, he went to bed as always. That night, he dreamt that the huldre woman who had given him the scythe came to him and said, "You have already cut very much hay, but your mistress will not need much time to rake it together and then she will chase you away if she catches up with you tomorrow. If you think that the hay you have already cut is not enough, go now to the forge and take as many scythe handles as you think you need. Fasten scythes to them, take them to the field and see what happens."

After the huldre woman spoke, she left. The harvest hand awoke, got up and began to cut hay. In the morning, his mistress came out carrying five rakes. She said, "You have cut much hay – much more than I had thought." She then laid the rakes here and there in the meadow and then began to rake.

The young hand saw that she could rake much hay, but that the other rakes did also even though no one was by them. When midday approached and he saw that the cut hay would not be enough he went to the forge, took some scythe handles and fastened scythes to them. He then went outside and spread the scythes on the uncut meadow. The scythes began to cut and

soon the area began to grow. This continued for the whole day until evening when there was enough hay cut. In the evening, the woman went home, taking her rakes with her and asking the young hand to follow her.

She said that he knew more than she had thought, and so she would reward him and that he could stay with her as long as he liked. He stayed with her for the summer, and they got on well with each other. They harvested much hay but had much time for themselves. After the harvest, she gave him a handsome payment. With that, he returned to the southland.

The next summer and all summers thereafter when he looked for harvest work, he found it with her. He then acquired a farm for himself in the southland, where everyone regarded him as an ambitious man. He was a clever sailor, adept at everything to which he laid a hand. He always cut his own hay, never using any other scythe than the one that the huldre woman had given him. Still, he was just as fast at harvesting his home fields as the others were.

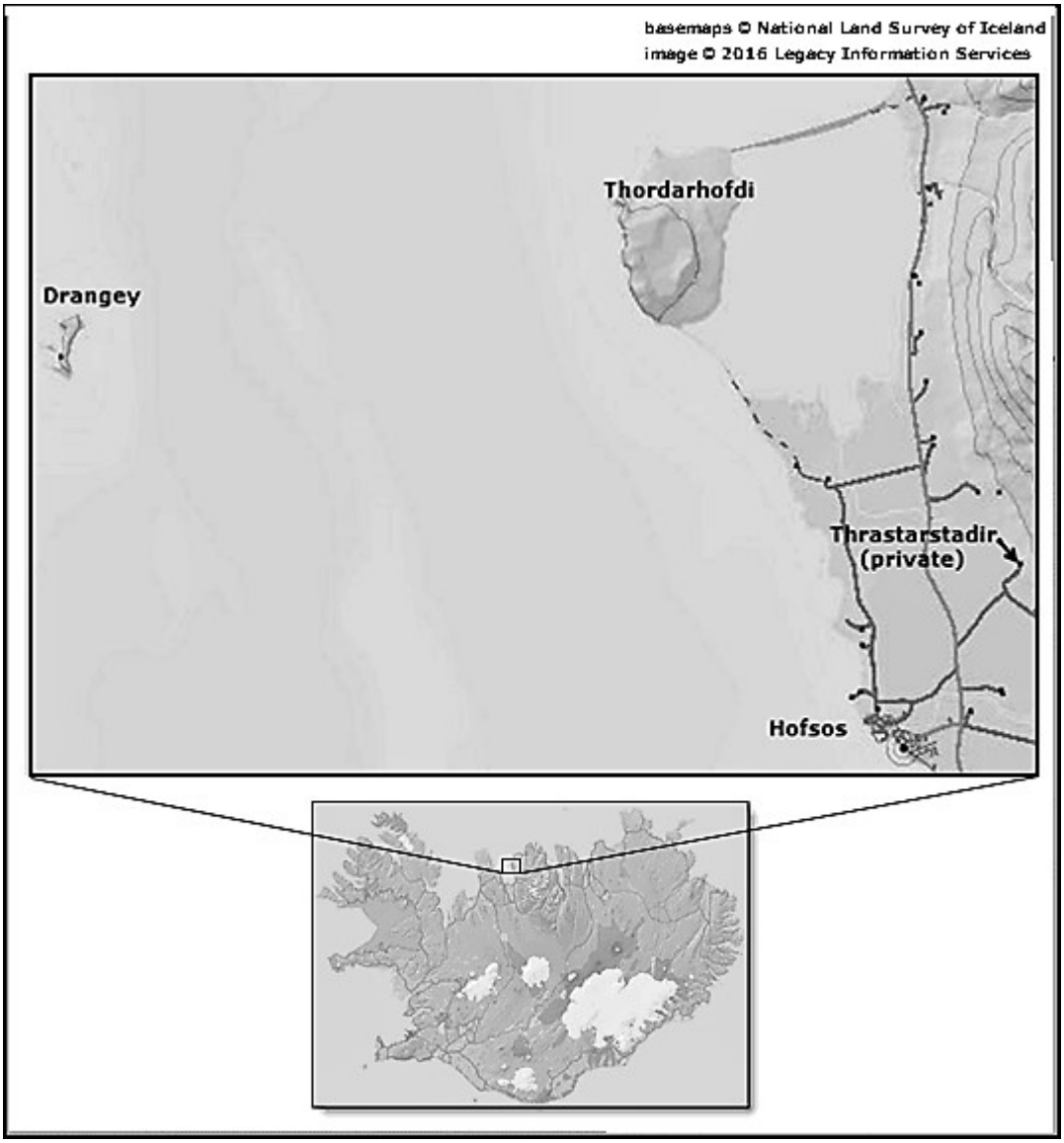
It then happened one summer as he had sailed out to fish, that a neighbor came to his farm and asked his wife for a scythe. He had broken his own scythe and didn’t know what to do. The wife searched through her husband’s tools and found the good old scythe. She loaned the scythe to the neighbor but cautioned him never to place it in fire because her husband never did so, she told him.

This he promised her, and returned home. He fastened the scythe to a handle and began to cut the hay. But he was unable to cut a single straw. Angrily, he began to hone the scythe, but it was no help. So he took the scythe to the forge to hammer a new edge, thinking that it could do no harm to lay the scythe in the forge fire.

But as soon as the scythe was in the fire it melted like wax, becoming just molten iron slag. He went back to the man’s wife and told her what had happened. She was very fearful, as she knew her man would be very angry when he learned what had happened.

And that was indeed the case; still, it is not told that he was angry for very long; only that he stroked his wife’s cheek for the first and last time.

Chapter 7. Thord of Throstestad (Thrastarstadir)



A man named Thord lived at Throstestad in Höfdeströnd in Skagafjord. People thought that he had an unusual disposition.

It happened one winter that he had gone to the Hofsos marketplace, thinking all the while that it was no weather in which to find his way. He carried a sack of goods with him down over the bog, as from there it was not far to Hofsos. When he had gone a short distance, he lost his way but continued his wandering until the evening.

He then believed that he saw a pair of shanties, but they were so tall that he was amazed. Still, he went to them and found a light in the window. Peering through the window, he saw people entertaining themselves inside with stringed instruments and dancing.

He went to the door and knocked. A man wearing a kilt came to the door and asked what he wished. Thord said that he had lost his way and asked if he might find shelter if that was possible. The man at the door said he most likely could, “Follow me inside now with your sack of goods. Tomorrow I will do trading with you, and you will probably not be any less pleased to trade here than in Hofsos.”

Thord could not believe his eyes, as everything seemed like a dream. The man in the kilt led him into the room, although Thord was not well dressed. There were many people including the wife, children and the rest of the household. All were clean and orderly, and they sang and were cheerful. The man in the kilt, man of the house, said quietly to his wife but loud enough for Thord to hear: “A wayward wanderer has come, is tired and needs sustenance. Give him some refreshing drink, my dear.” Seeing this poor soul tugged at her heart and she quickly stood up and brought him both good and abundant food.

The man of the house then came with two beakers, filled them, drank one himself and offered Thord the other to drink up as well. This he did, thinking that he had never drunk such good wine in his life. Things were very enjoyable and Thord was not bored, although he found this adventure quite strange.

He became one beaker after the other, and began to be quite drunk. He was then shown to a soft bed where he slept the night away to clear his stupor. The next morning he again became food and wine that tasted even better than the night before.

The man of the house then went outside with him and asked him if he wished to trade, to which Thord answered, “Yes”. They then entered a storeroom containing all manner of goods. Thord let his goods be weighed, and the man who was buying gave him half again more for his goods than was usually the rule in Hofsos.

His host then gave Thord a sack of grain, silk and various trading goods that he could use – all at only half of the usual price. When they were

finished, the man of the house gave him a large scarf for his wife, white bread for his children, saying that he was now rewarded for once rescuing the life of the man’s son. Thord did not think that this was the case but the man of the house said that indeed it was.

“You were once near Thordhoefde with other men. They wanted to sail over to Drangoe and so laid waiting for a good wind. Your comrades passed the time throwing stones toward the cliffs. The weather was warm and sunny and so my son was lying at rest under the cliffs, as he was tired from standing watch the whole night.

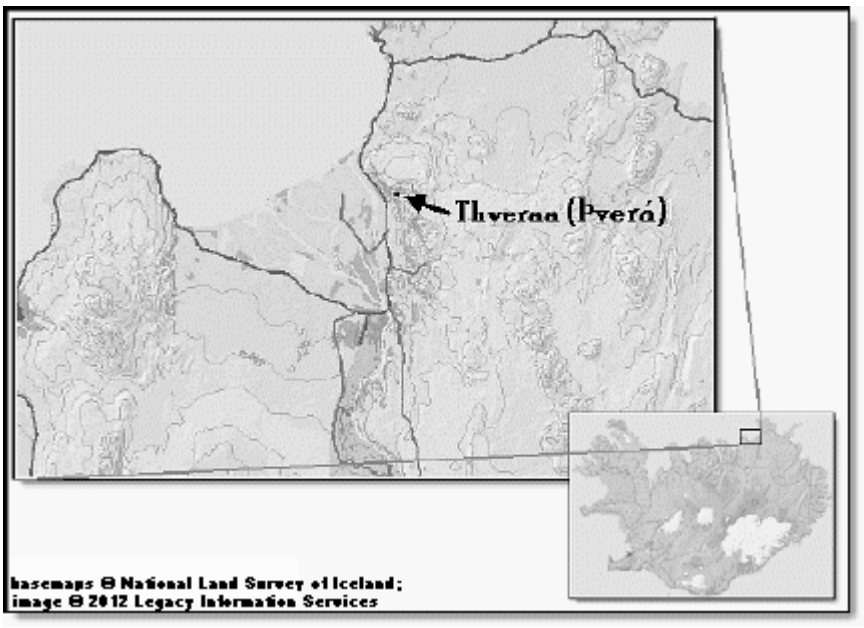
“But you forbid them from throwing the stones, saying that it was pointless. They indeed listened to you, but made fun of you for your spirit and said that you were always a curious kind of man. But if you had not restrained them, they would have killed my son.”

After this, Thord prepared himself to return home as now the weather had cleared. He bid everyone goodbye. The man of the house led him back to the path toward home, wished him a happy trip and then returned to his own home. Thord went on toward home, but as he once again looked for the place where they had traded, he saw nothing other than the usual Thordshoefde lying not far ahead.

He wondered quite a bit about it, went on his way home, met his wife and told her everything. He showed her the goods, giving her the scarf. She was overjoyed, thanking her husband for the gift. Word of Thord’s goods spread throughout and people came from afar to see them. Never had people seen their like in the region, and possibly nowhere were the like to be found even if one looked anywhere.

Thord never saw the man nor his family ever again, but he was proud to display the traded goods for as long as he lived.

Chapter 8. The Child’s Cradle

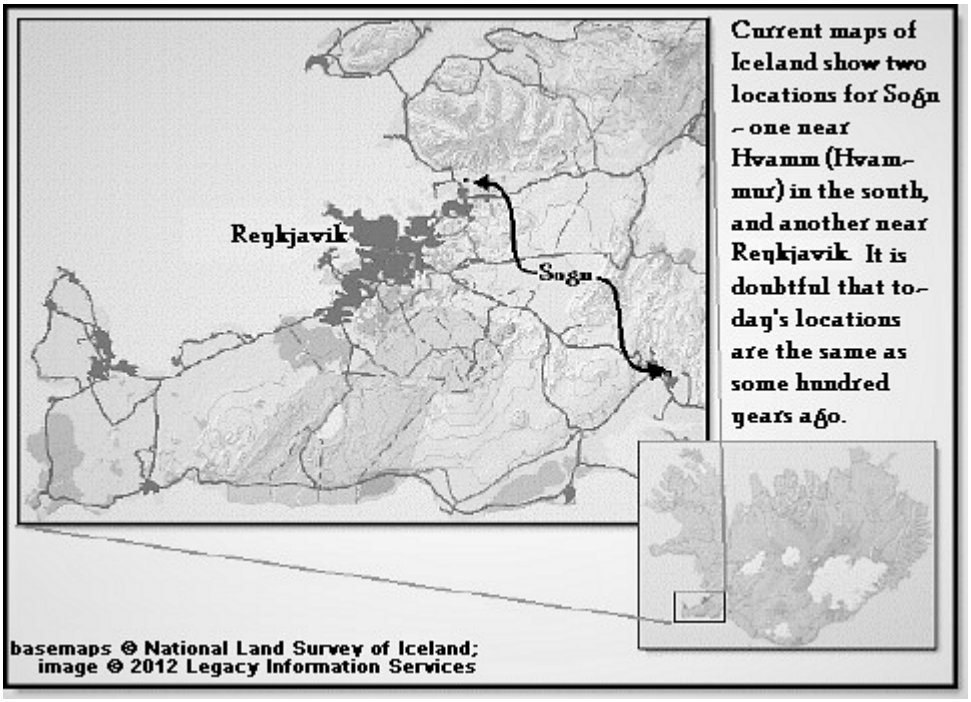


Kirsten, who lived on Little Thveraa, told of her mother the clairvoyant who as a child was once in the meadow and saw two women coming down from the mountain with a manlike figure between them, and they were carrying something. As the three came closer, the child saw that the object was a cradle covered with something red.

They then took the manlike being and drew blood from him so that he slowly became smaller until he was a dwarf. They then kneaded him until he was no larger than an infant. They then placed him in the cradle, covered it with the red cloth and then carried it between them toward the farm.

The child told her mother, who was with her, what she had seen. They both hurried back toward the house, arriving at the same time as the huldre women, just as they were trying to leave the cradle in front of the house. But when the huldre women saw them, they quickly took the child out of the cradle, beating it and kicking it ahead down the way in front of them. This suddenly caused the childlike dwarf to become larger until he was his normal size, which then followed the women back up the mountain where all three of them disappeared.

Chapter 9. The Changeling of Sogn[4]


Reykjavik
Sogn
Current maps of Iceland show two locations for Sogn – one near Hvamm (Hvammur) in the south, and another near Reykjavik. It is doubtful that today's locations are the same as some hundred years ago.
basemaps © National Land Survey of Iceland;
image © 2012 Legacy Information Services

Two farmers once owned the farm at Sogn. One of them had a son who people believed was not of a right mind. He could not read, write or otherwise behave normally; instead, he lay the whole day in bed and ate an amount which appeared to most to be enough for two.

When he had reached confirmation age, it happened one winter that almost everyone in the house except the boy had left the darkness of the bath hall(5) to relieve themselves. Only the wife of the other farmer, recovering from childbirth, still lay in the bath hall next to the boy. While the others were away, the woman heard the boy yawn so loudly that she began to feel uncomfortable.

She soon began to tremble as she then heard him begin to behave in an unearthly way. She then heard him begin to toss back and forth and to stretch. She saw as he stood up that he reached clear to the roof of the bath hall, which had an open gallery on one side where the roof beams were exposed and supported with small crossbeams.

The boy had now grown so large that he leaned his head against the crossbeams, where again he was again overcome with grotesque yawning such that his mouth became gigantic and so distended that his upper jaw was above the crossbeam and his lower jaw below it.

He appeared to the poor woman so horrible and repugnant that she screamed to the heavens with a cry like dying over what she saw. No sooner had she let out her cry when the boy collapsed as though struck by a shot, crept back into bed and became still again just before the others returned.

Having been alone in the bath hall with the boy, the poor woman was long thereafter possessed with fear. From this day on, no one doubted that the boy was a changeling.

4. The authors' original term for changeling, "Wechselbalg" (German 'wechsel' = changed/exchanged, and 'Balg' = infant), has a number of meanings ranging from a mentally exceptional child such as one with Downs' Syndrome or other birth anomaly to a child who was believed to have been exchanged at birth. Both definitions come into play in the belief that the "good" infant was secretly taken and replaced with the anomalous child by an elf, troll or even the devil or other demon. In his online website, D. L. Ashliman relates other Scandinavian changeling tales.

5. The bath hall of the Middle Ages fulfilled a number of purposes, not just bathing but also for treatment of general malaise and health-related matters and even as a social function. From haircuts to bloodletting with leeches, the belief was to restore "balance" of four elements: yellow and black gall, blood and pflegm. This was then believed to be done through urination, perspiring, defecation and vomiting — all as parts of the bathing ritual. The dissertation "Körperpflege im früheren Mittelalter" (Body Care in the Early Middle Ages) by S. Schlegel adds some insight (German original,here using the Google translate tool).

Chapter 10. The Little Merman

There is an old expression in Iceland, “The little merman laughed….” People say that the origin comes from a time when a farmer who was fishing once caught a sea dwarf called a merman. The creature had a large head and long hands but from the waist down, he resembled a seal. The merman refused to reveal anything to the farmer, so he took the merman against his will on land.

The farmer’s wife, who was young and high-spirited, came down to the shore to meet him joyfully, kissing and caressing him. He rejoiced greatly over this, praising her but he kicked his dog, who also wanted nothing more than to show his joy at the farmer’s return. The merman saw this and laughed. The farmer asked what he was laughing at. “Your stupidity,” the merman replied.

When the farmer had returned home from the sea, he tripped over a hummock and fell. The farmer cursed the hummock a hundred times, as it had reappeared after the farmer had recently leveled his fields. The merman, who disliked being carried, laughed again and said, “The farmer is a twit!”

The farmer kept the merman three days, during which a pair of young tradesmen came to sell their wares. The farmer had never been able to find thick-soled and solid smooth leather boots as he wanted. The tradesmen thought that they indeed offered the best there were. The farmer had a choice of hundreds of pairs, but instead found them all too thin to hold up. Again, the merman laughed and said, “Some are wrong, even when they think they are clever.”

Neither as good or bad would the merman give more wisdom than that already told. However, under the condition that he be returned to the place at sea where he was caught, he agreed to sit on the boat’s rudder and answer all of the farmer’s questions; otherwise, he would remain quiet. After three days, the farmer did as the merman wished. As the merman sat on the boat’s rudder the farmer asked what fishermen must do to have a good catch.

The merman answered, “From well-chewed and –kneaded iron you must smith barbed hooks, and the forge must be where the sound of both river and sea can be heard. The hooks must be hardened in the foam of a

stallion’s mouth; to fasten the hooks you must use a leader of grey steer hide and a line of raw horsehide.

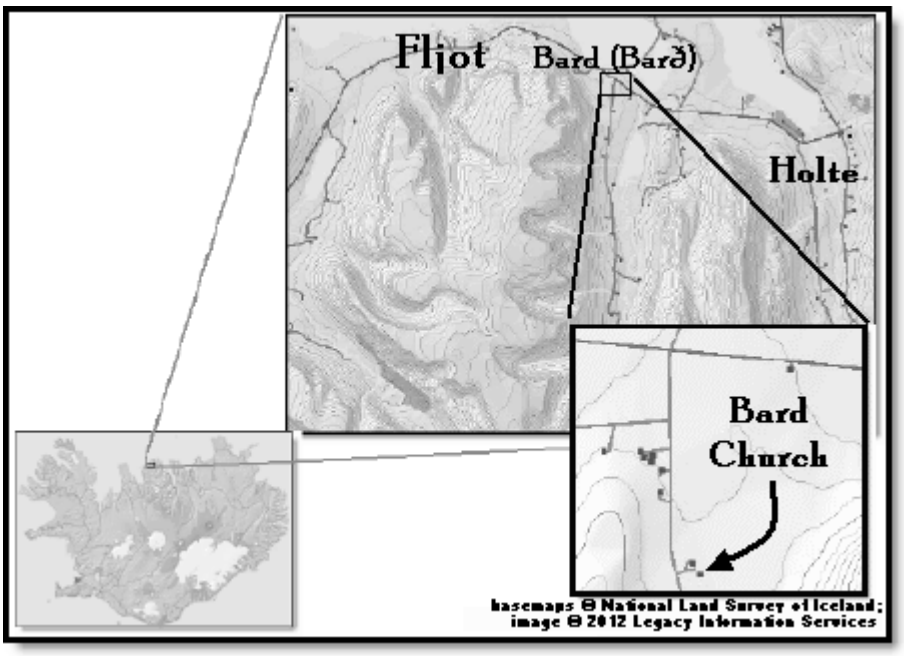
“As bait, use the heart of a bird and the meat of a flounder, but in the middle of the hook you must place human flesh. If you cannot catch fish with that, you will live only a short time. And, the barbs on the hooks must be bent outward.”

The farmer then asked what stupidity the merman had laughed about when his wife praised him and he kicked his dog. The merman answered, “Over your own stupidity, farmer! Your dog loves you more than he does his own life! Your wife wishes only your death and is a slovenly woman. The hummock that you cursed was your pile of gold, hiding much wealth. So you were a fool, farmer, and so I laughed at you.

“And the black boots you refused would have lasted your whole life since you only have a few days ahead of you; they could actually take you through your last three days.”

With that, the merman sprang from the rudder into the sea. With that, the two parted and events happened just as the merman had said.

Chapter 11. The Sea Sprite



The farmers in the congregation of Bard in Fljot had the task of repairing the wall around the church. Early one morning, everyone was there except an old man who everyone thought was mean and of unfriendly demeanor. As midday approached, the old man was still not there. The others felt that he certainly let himself be waited for. At noon, they finally saw him approaching leading a grey horse on a harness. When he arrived, he had to endure the curses of those already there for coming so late to the task. He took it in stride, asking what he needed to do.

As things stood, he was to work with a group who would gather turf and clay pieces from which to make the wall. At this, the old man appeared satisfied.

The old grey horse was mean and ill behaved with the other horses, biting and kicking them; the result was that none of the other horses could defend themselves. The owners of these horses felt it shameful, and agreed that the grey horse should carry a greater load. But that helped little; it carried the greater load with the same ease as the earlier loads, still misbehaving as before until all the other horses had been chased away and it alone remained.

The old man then took his horse and loaded it with a much of a load on its back as everyone previously had given all the other horses together, leading him back and forth. The grey horse now behaved very well. As a result, they delivered everything that was needed to improve the wall. But when this work was finished, the old man took the harness from the horse, slapped it on the rump and let it go free.

This did not seem to please the horse, which kicked back with both hind hooves against a portion of the wall already built up. This caused a large piece to fall away, and although it was often repaired later it never held correctly; this is why in its place a gateway to the church was later added.

The last anyone saw of the horse’s antics was that it made a jump as soon as it felt free and never stopped until it disappeared into Lake Hóp. Everyone then understood that it was really a sea sprite.

Chapter 12. Kort of Mödruvold and the Sea Monster

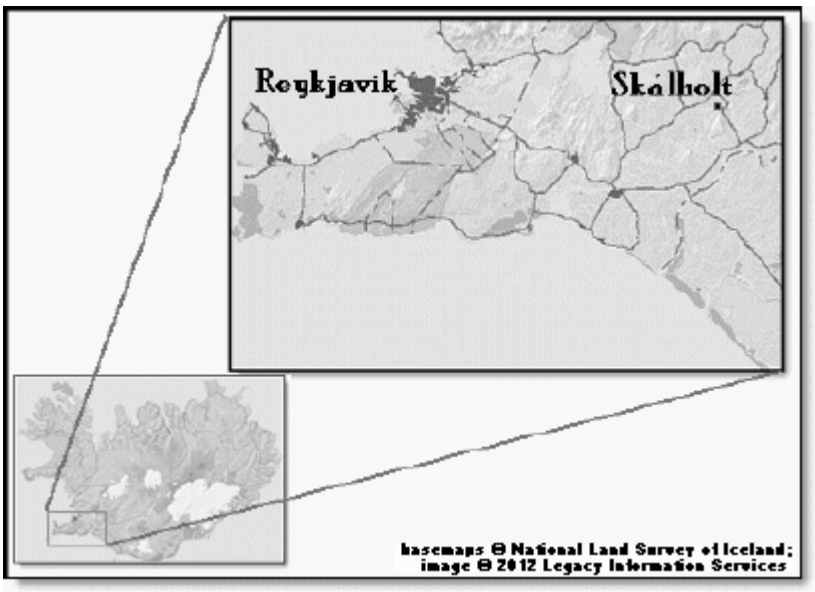
As was his custom, Kort was doing winter fishing and staying with other fishermen in a sea shanty on the shore. The shanty door locked with a lock that only opened with a key.

One night, after they had locked the door from within on the previous evening and all were asleep, it happened that Kort dreamt that a monster came into the shanty and took him by the hand. It seemed to him that he got up and crept with the monster under the bed and from there the monster forced him through the shanty wall outside, which he found very uncomfortable.

The monster then led him onto the beach and down to the tidal gauge, where he saw that the monster tried to lure him into the sea. He then dreamt that he became enraged, something he was given to do, and forcibly attacked the monster. The result was that Kort gained the upper hand, throwing the monster into the sea.

At that moment, he awoke and found himself standing at the tidal gauge in his underclothing, the same that he had worn as he went to bed. His first thought was that he sleepwalked and wandered to this point. But when he returned to the shanty and found the door locked just as they had left it the evening before. He could not enter until he had awakened his companions to unlock the door, and it became clear to him that some powers other than sleepwalking were at play and that things had actually occurred just as he had dreamt.

Chapter 13. Bishop Brynjolf



Translator's note: Brynjolf Sveinsson (1605-1675) was a Lutheran bishop at Skálholt from 1639 to 1674 and is credited with gathering many of the original manuscripts that comprise the elder Edda, the older poetic legends that are the basis of old Norse literature. It was Brynjolf who also retrieved one of the most notable Icelandic records, the Flateyjarbók (Flatey Book), which tells not only the history of the kings of Norway, among them St. Olaf, but also the Greenland Saga that, along with the Saga of Erik the Red, alludes to the first settlement in North America.

Bishop Brynjolf was making his usual circuit ride and was once in Skálholt where he pitched his tent on a mountainside. With him in his entourage were four or five men.

At night, the bishop awoke to find an unusually large hand reaching inside the tent, and a voice came from outside, "A tent for a farmer, a coarse man!" The bishop then saw that a giantess had come, and one that was by no means small. So the bishop said to the giantess that she should take one of his horses that she found to her liking.

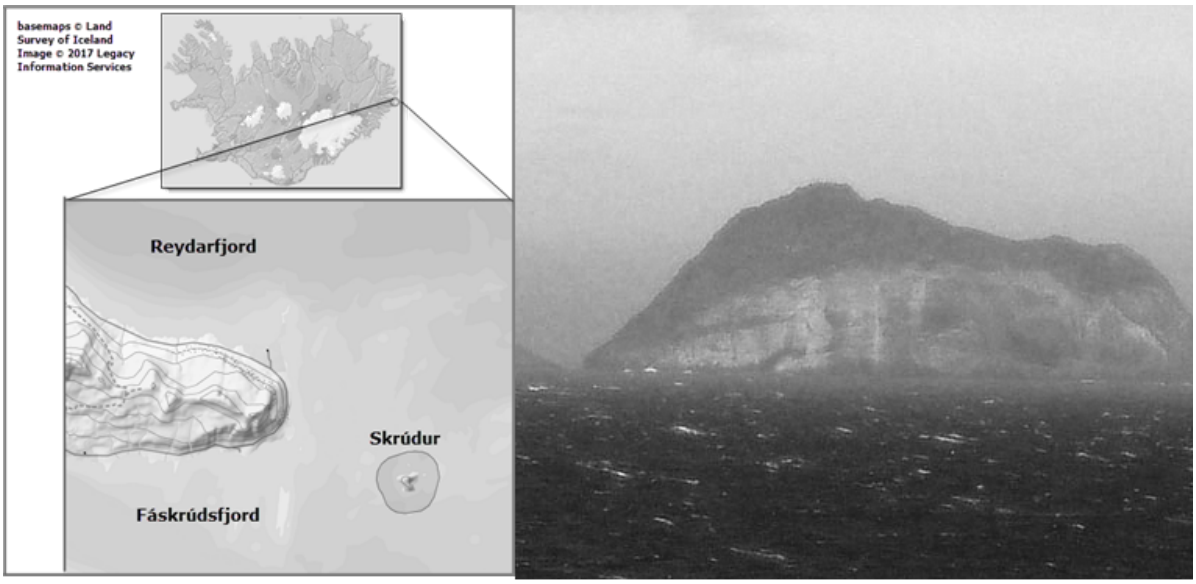
This the giantess did, leaving and taking a horse with her. She threw it lightly over her shoulder as though it were a sheep, then made her way up the mountain.

The next summer, the bishop made a stop at the same place. But when his entourage awoke the next day, the bishop had disappeared from his tent. They went out to look for him. After much searching, they found him in a

cave in the mountain, sitting and talking with the giantess who had visited his tent the summer before. They saw that she was crying, and it seemed as though hail poured from her eyes.

What the bishop and giantess had talked about, they did not know. But the bishop followed them, heading homewards again. From this time, on, the bishop always made a practice each Christmas Eve night of tying a stallion in front of the barn at Skálholt. Each morning that followed, the stallion was gone, and people knew that the giantess had taken it for Christmas dinner.

Chapter 14. The Troll of the Cliffs



Scrúður Island, Reydarfjord/Fáskrúdsfjord

At Holme in Reydarfjord, a priest’s daughter once disappeared. The people searched for some time for her everywhere, but she was nowhere to be found.

Then as now, a sharply protruding cliff known as Skrudur rose from the fjord. Each autumn, the people who lived in the area kept their livestock on the meadow there, bringing them back just after Christmas. Each year, the one best sheep of the herd was missing, but the others were never lost.

It happened one winter that a pair of fishing boats was unable to reach their usual landing place. One of the boats steered under the Skrudur cliffs where the crew was able to beach the craft and make camp, wet and frozen as they were, in a recess in the cliffs. Here they began singing the Ave Maria(6).

The cliffs then opened, and an unusually large man’s hand bearing rings on every finger and a scarlet sleeve over the wrist appeared. It reached out and offered the fishermen a bowl of gruel and with as many spoons as there were men. From inside the cliffs, a voice said, “It pleases my wife, but it gives me none.”

When the fishermen had eaten their fill of the warm gruel and once again felt strengthened, the bowl disappeared back into the cliffs. The next day, they reached the mainland.

The next year at the same time, another fishing boat had the same experience. This time, the fishermen sat in the recess in the cliffs and quietly sang the Song of Andrew to its end. The same hand came out of the cliffs with a bowl full of juicy smoked meat, and they heard a voice saying, “It now gives me pleasure, but it gives my wife none(7).” Satisfied, the fishermen returned to the mainland when the weather had again become calm.

A few years passed, and it happened that Bishop Gudmund(8) was traveling through the Eastlands blessing the seas and springs. While visiting Holme, he also confined the serpent in the waterfall below the river. A being appearing to be the local priest came to him and asked him to bless the Skrudur. Bishop Gudmund said that it was not his intent to do so because of the huldre folk who lived there. The priest then became angry, telling the bishop “I have much here that I would find difficult to take away, so I must tell you that you will not make more trips if you come again to my area to do me harm.”

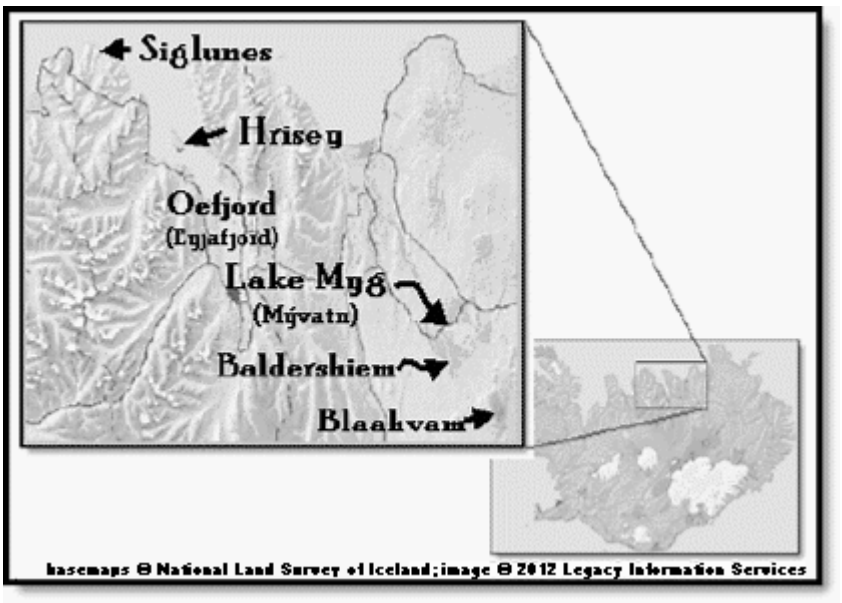
Bishop Gudmund avoided the temptation to conflict, but still did not bless the Skrudur.

6. Translator’s note: many Christian cultures over the centuries have versions of “Ave Maria” that were often sung in times of danger or other life-threatening matters.

7. The troll’s wife’s name was Christin so she took pleasure at hearing Ave Maria, while the troll was pleased at hearing Andrew’s song since Andrew was a troll like him.

8. Translator’s note: this is a reference to Bishop Gudmund Arason, who is reputed to have traveled throughout Iceland consecrating wells and springs as well as performing other miracles, both natural and supernatural. The serpent mentioned here is the mythical “Skirimsl”, which Gudmund supposedly confined to the ocean until Doomsday.

Chapter 15. The Giantess of Blaahvam



In the old days, on Blaahvam at Blaafjeld, there once lived giantess named Kraaka. She lived in a cave, traces of which are still found today. It is so high between the cliffs of Blaahvam that men are still unable to reach it.

Kraaka did much harm; she often attacked the livestock of the people of Mygsö, killing their sheep and the people. She was man-crazy, and liked it little to live alone. So it was that she often took men from the villages below and kept them to herself. But few were able to survive; they either ran away or killed themselves.

She once took a shepherd from Baldersjem named Jon, who she took into her cave and tried to please. He found little to like, refusing everything that she served him. She tried everything imaginable that she thought he would enjoy, but nothing helped. Finally the shepherd let it be known that he would again find his appetite if he could dine on a 12-year-old seal.

Through her magic, Kraaka found that such a seal was only to be found on Siglunes and although it was far from Blaahvam, she was determined to try to catch the seal. So she departed, leaving the man behind. But when she had gone only a short way, she realized that it would be safer to be sure that he was well kept and that he had not escaped as soon as she had turned her

back. So she went back to her cave, where the herder still sat quietly. She then left again; this time she went a bit further before the same fear overcame her that the man may have been unfaithful. So she ran back again to her cave, only to find him just as the first time sitting quietly there just as before.

She left once again in earnest, believed that she had nothing more to fear from the herder. She went the most direct way to Siglunes, north over Hrisey Island and across the Oefjord. No more is told of her trip other than she was able to catch the seal, returning the same way that she had come.

No sooner did the shepherd believe that Kraaka had traveled the full way then he crept out of the cave and stole away. Shortly after he had left, Kraaka returned and soon saw that he had escaped. She immediately began in haste to follow him. When the shepherd had gone only a short way toward the farm at Baldershjem, he heard a loud roar coming from behind him; he knew what it meant: that Kraaka was coming. As she was close enough for him to hear her voice, she called, “Here is the seal, Jon; it is 12 years old, almost 13!”

The shepherd paid no attention to her, and when he reached the farm where the farmer was working at his forge he ran inside, hiding behind the farmer just as Kraaka reached the door. The farmer took the glowing iron from the forge and walked toward Kraaka, threatening to thrust the hot iron into her body if she didn’t turn around if she didn’t promise never again to bother his people.

Kraaka saw that she had no other choice but to turn around, which she did. From this day, on, one never heard again that she came too near the farmer from Baldershjem.

But on another occasion, Kraaka took a shepherd from Grönnewand, dragging him along into her cave. It happened as before that the shepherd would not eat anything that Kraaka put before him, and that bothered her greatly. Finally, he told her he would eat young ram meat.

But at that time, there were no young rams except on the Hafrafells peninsula at Oexefjord. And although it was a far distance away from Hvam for her to get it, Kraaka wanted to try to get the ram meat. But before leaving, she took a monstrously large stone and set it in front of the cave

entrance; this time she did not want to lose this herder as she had the previous one.

She then went on her way. When she came to the Jökel, a stream between the mountains, she jumped from one cliff to another over the stream. To this day, that place is called Witch's Jump.

No more is known about her travels until she came to the Hafrafells peninsula. Here she took two rams, tying them together at the horns and throwing them over her shoulder. She then returned to her cave over the same path, crossing over the Jökel at the same place.

But after crossing the stream, she found that she was very tired from the trip and so wished to take a short nap. So she set the rams free, setting them in the meadow in a nearby ravine, which still today is called Ram's Ravine. After she had rested a while, she took the rams and continued her trip.

It is told that in the meantime, the shepherd had tried thousands of tricks to escape from the cave. But nowhere could he find a hole or crevasse through which to escape. Finally, he found a large, sharp sword and used it to pry the stone that blocked the cave entrance, making a hole large enough through which to escape. After coming out, he ran with all his strength and returned to a settled area. No more is known of him except that he returned home unharmed.

One Christmas, Kraaka invited others of her kind to a big holiday feast, and took great measures to provide only the finest. But she found that she lacked one thing: she was unable to offer humans as appetizers. So on Christmas Eve she traveled to an area where people were living. But when she came to the largest farms in Mygsö she found that they were all empty; everyone had left for church in nearby Skutustad.

It was then the custom to hold services each holy night, and everyone was already in the church. Kraaka approached the door of the church and saw a man sitting on a bench in the corner. She reached out her arm for him to pull him out of the church. But with all his strength, he kicked toward her with his feet, crying loudly for help.

Immediately others came to his aid, and the result was that the whole community united against Kraaka to tear the man out of her hands. Still, she held him fast; as a result, a church wall became loose, bending outward.

The story continues that Kraaka became angry and wished that the church wall never again would be stable.

This evil wish seems to have been fulfilled, as ever since then the south wall of the church at Skutustad is always in need of repair. It is also told that because of this as well as other tricks that the residents of the upper area of Mygsö had played on her, she promised that she would also get even with a trick of her own over which she would long think.

Above the village, where the farmers had a summer meadow, there was a large lake. One day, Kraaka went there and gathered a large bundle of brush and twigs. She then combined it with turf and gravel to make a huge load. This, she dragged behind her from the lake down to Mygsö and through the village to the Lax River near where it flows out of Myg Lake.

Here, where she had dragged the large mass, there now was a deep ditch. Kraaka then used her mass to re-channel the stream into the ditch so that it now flowed into Mygsö and remained so as long as the village was occupied. This flooded the meadows and fields so that the only thing that the people could find to stop the flooding was the same material Kraaka had used to make her own load. This resulted in the destruction of the upper part of the village.

The stream, which to this day still flows in that same place, is named after her and is called the Kraaka. It caused great harm to the farmers of Mygsö, running over the meadows of the farms of those most prominent in the village and damaging them so that each year the good land was washed away and sand was washed up.

Each year in the spring, it washed away the banks and poured sand and clay over the meadows. Many of the farms were in danger of being destroyed; each year the holes are filled with brush, gravel and turf – the same things that Kraaka used to make her load. But soon there was such a lack of brush around Lake Myg that there is hardly enough as was needed to plug the banks of the Kraaka.

For both young and old, it became clear that old Kraaka’s curse and evil predictions would soon become true.

Chapter 16. Gilitrutt

Beneath the island cliffs of the Eastlands there once lived a young farmer. He was an ambitious and industrious man. Around his house were good meadows, and he had many sheep. At the time of this tale, he had just wed. His wife was young but incapable and lazy. She would do nothing, and gave no care to the farm. The young farmer liked this little, but was unable to change things.

In the fall, he gave her some wool and asked her to weave cloth from it during the winter. But the wife gave him no direct or friendly answer; winter came but she did nothing with the wool although the young farmer reminded her of it often.

One day, a somewhat tall, elderly woman came to the wife and asked for a small donation. “As compensation, can you do something for me?” replied the wife. “I can do that,” said the woman. “What is it?”

The wife said, “Spin wool into cloth.”

“Give it to me,” said the woman, at which the wife took an enormous woolsack out and gave it to the woman. The woman took the sack, threw it over her shoulder and said, “I will bring you the material on the first day of summer.”

“What do you want in payment?” said the wife. “Very little,” said the woman. “You must only guess my name in three tries, and then we are even.” This, the wife promised to do, and the woman went on her way.

Winter passed, and the farmer often asked his wife what became of the wool. She answered that it was not his concern and that he would learn of it on the first day of summer. So the young farmer said no more about it.

The last day of winter then came, and the wife began to think about the woman’s name. But she was unable to see the slightest chance of learning what it might be. She soon became sad and depressed. The farmer saw that she had changed and wanted to know what was bothering her, so she told him everything. He became afraid, and said that she had dealt poorly with the matter and that the woman was most certainly a witch who intended to take her.

The farmer then was wandering high under the cliffs, he found a large gravel mound. Busy with his troubles and not knowing what to do, he heard

the sounds of knocking inside the mound. Upon investigating, he found an opening and saw that below an unusually large woman was sitting and weaving. She held the loom between her knees and worked it unceasingly. She hummed as she worked:

“Hi, hi and ho, ho!

The wife knows not what I am called.

Hi, hi and ho, ho!

Gilitrutt I’m called, ho, ho!

Gilitrutt I’m called, hi, hi and ho, ho!”

With that, she continued without pause, striking heftily at the loom. The farmer was pleased, because he thought this must be the old woman who had visited his wife in the fall. He returned home and wrote the name “Gilitrutt” on a note. But he told his wife nothing about it, and the last day of winter came.

His wife was filled with worry and didn’t dress herself the whole day long. The farmer went to her and asked her if she knew the name of the woman. But she answered, “No” and said that she must now die of sorrow. The farmer told her that she wouldn’t need to do that, giving her the note with the name and telling her all that had happened.

She took the note, but shook with fear because she thought that the name might be wrong. She asked her husband to stay by her when the woman returned. But he said, “No, since you gave her the wool it is best that you alone repay her.” With that, he left her.

The next day was the first one of summer. The wife lay in her bed; otherwise, there was no one at the farm. Then she heard a strong hammering with rumbling steps coming from below the ground. Then, the old woman appeared. She appeared in no way very charming, and threw the huge ball of wool on the floor, saying “Who am I then? Who am I then?”

The wife, now more dead than alive with fear, said, “Signy”.

“So that’s who I am? So that’s who I am? Guess again, wife!” said the woman.

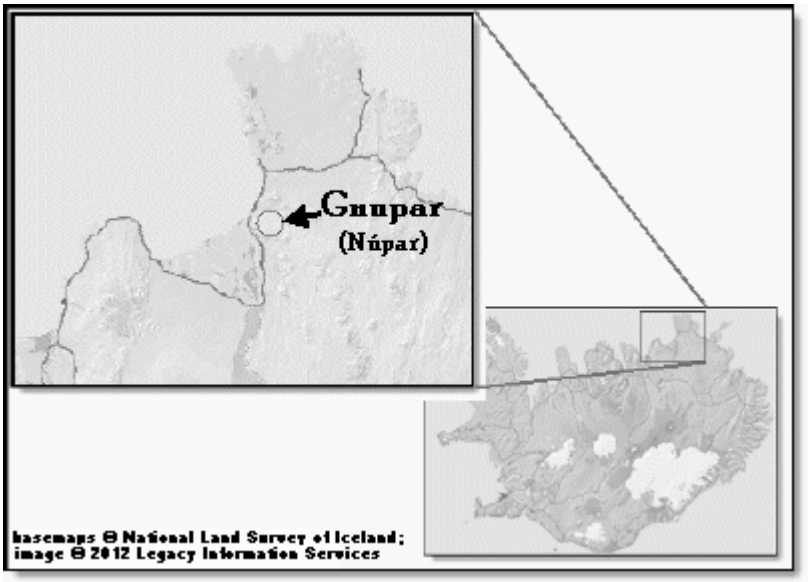
“Asa”, replied the wife.

“So that’s who I am? So that’s who I am? Guess once more, wife!” said the woman.

“Are you named Gilitrutt?” the wife asked her.

When the old woman heard that, she was so shocked that she fell flat on the floor, making a horrible banging sound. She stood again, and then left and the wife never saw her again. The wife was overjoyed beyond all measure to be freed so easily from this monster, and she became another person entirely. From that day on, she was ambitious, punctual and always spun all of the wool herself.

Chapter 17. The Farmer from Gnupar



A farmer at Gnupar in Syssel Thingö once dreamt that a woman came to him and complained that his children threw stones into a nearby lake, and thereby scared the trout that she needed to earn her living.

The farmer took no heed of her complaint, feeling that it was not necessary to scold his children seriously for their mischief. So the children continued throwing stones in the water, just as before.

The same woman again came to the farmer in his sleep, and this time she threatened him with revenge. The next winter, it happened one evening that a number of windowpanes in the farm were smashed. The farmer ran outside to see who had played this prank on him, but he saw no one. And the freshly fallen snow showed no signs of tracks from either man or beast.

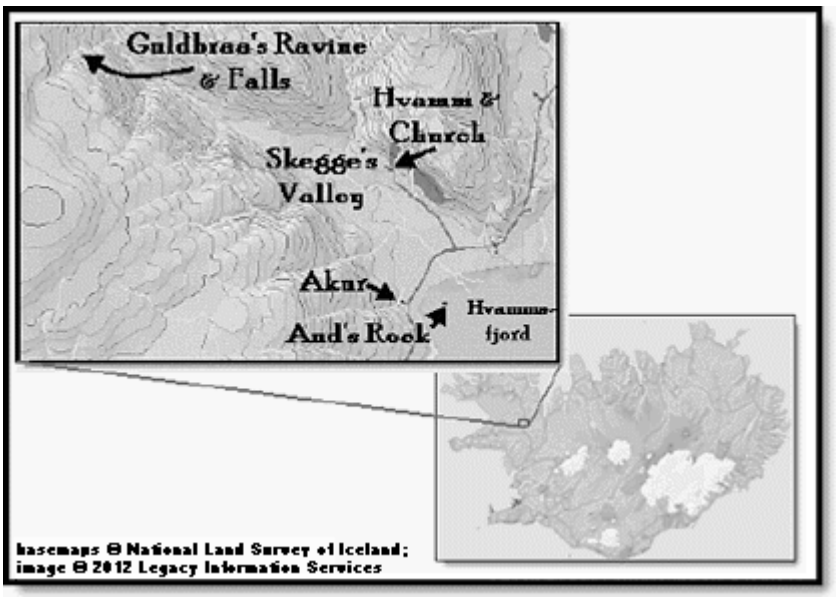
One other time, the lamp that stood on the table was also mysteriously extinguished by a human hand but with no one present. A girl went into the kitchen to light the lamp, but was unable to light the fire in the oven. Three times she tried to light the lamp, and each time the lamp was again extinguished. The farmer himself came to the kitchen and with much trouble was again able to light the lamp.

Another time, the farmer was hit in the head by heavy, thick shoes thrown by an unseen hand. Angrily, he threw the shoes back toward where

they came from; but they were thrown right back in his face with twice the speed as before.

Finally, the people on the farm felt it was too much to be plagued by these afflictions so that the farmer took everything and everyone and moved away, and to this day the farm is no longer occupied.

Chapter 18. Guldbraa and Skegge



Hvamm (Hvammur), once the main homestead of the Sturlungs, sits in a narrow valley. A stream flows through the valley, and directly opposite Hvamm on the other side of the stream is a farm called Akur. There are no other farms in the valley.

Akur was occupied earlier, although it really belongs to the Hvamm estate. Already in the Sturlung sagas at one point it tells of Sturla recounting his dream where he says that it seems to him as though he was on a slope “opposite Akur”. A number of places in the valley are named after Guldbraa. She is the first reputed to have lived at Akur. The following tale, generally known in the Westlands, is of her.

Aud the Land Rich(9) took all of the lands at Hvammsfjord, later living at Hvamm. Here, she lived in great splendor and surrounded with much wealth. On the eastern side of the stream grazed the livestock; the fields were on the west side of the valley, reaching up to the slopes mentioned earlier. These fields were very fertile, but nonetheless Aud left a part of the ground there fallow even though it appeared to be as rich as the rest.

Aud strictly forbade her hands from ever building on this southerly land or from allowing the livestock to graze there. If that were ever to happen accidentally, Aud said their milk could not be used.

When Aud had become very old, a wonderfully beautiful young woman came to Hvamm. She called herself Guldbraa, and no one knew where she was from or what her lineage was. She did not meet the mistress of the house, but only Aud's farm foreman. She asked him why the fields to the south of the stream had not been built upon; he answered that Aud had forbidden that they were ever to be built on or cultivated.

Guldbraa laughed loudly, and said that she wanted to buy the land. "I would rather have the smallest mound of that land than all of the other land in Hvamm. I foresee that the ways here and the house that will be built there is what I hate most of all. So give me the right to buy that land now, without asking Aud," she said, handing him a sack filled with gold. The gold pleased him greatly, and since Aud had given up the oversight of the farm into his hands, he took the gold and gave Guldbraa the rights to the land.

Aud soon learned of the land sale and confronted her foreman. She said that he would have no blessing from the gold, and that she foresaw that Guldbraa was a witch and would be a bad neighbor. It came that her foreboding about the land south of the stream was justified. "Still, the good luck of Hvamm's lands will stand," she said, "…so that nothing is harmed."

The foreman brought the sack of gold home and tried to give it to Aud, hoping to appease her. He untied it, and out swarmed a mass of snakes with a horrible stench. He soon lost his mind and died shortly thereafter. He was laid to rest with the bag in a crevasse in the cliffs that stood on the grounds of the land Guldbraa had bought. Since then, this place is called Serpent Gully.

Aud let the land sale stand, but all of the fields south of the stream from below at the sea up to a deep cliff ravine in the valley were left fallow. She had three crosses placed on the edge of the cliffs, from where this place later became known as Cross Ravine, and she said that Guldbraa's witchcraft would have no power over these crosses as long as she lived.

Guldbraa also prevented anyone from touching the crosses and prevented her stock from coming near. She built a large farm on her piece of land, erecting an altar where she made large sacrifices and practiced much magic. But whenever she turned her gaze toward Hvamm during her rituals, her witchcraft failed. She said that she always saw a large light on

the Hvamm homestead that she could not tolerate, and that it was distracted and made errors in her rituals. A similar glow radiated toward her from Aud's crosses at the edge of the cliffs, but she believed this was not as much of a danger as the light from the Hvamm homestead.

Aud and Guldbraa never actually met.nor did they allow their people to cross the stream and visit each other, and their livestock never mingled. Aud was a Christian, but her farm lacked the usual chapel. Instead, she arranged her prayers and services at Krossholar, as from there it was not possible to see the sacrificial altar at Akur.

Before she died, Aud proclaimed that she would not lie in unconsecrated ground. But she did state that she feared the violence of heathens and so asked to be buried next to the tidal scale(10). The place where she lies is now known as Aud's Rock, and it is still today a marker in the Hvammsfjord. When tides break over the rock, people say that the tide is either half-ebb or half-flood.

Following Aud's death, Gulbraa did not remain long at Akur. Although her power then grew, heathen ways in general lessened and the people of Hvamm began to ban heathen worship and sacrifice at Krossholar. Guldbraa found little peace because Aud's grave at the tidal scale was below her land and Aud's crosses were above her on the ravine on the cliffs.

She was very troubled by this, and so she left the land at Akur to the people of Hvamm, taking residence instead at the innermost part of the valley. Here, it was very dark; in the summer, the sun only shines when it sits low and in the winter, it shines in that part of the valley not at all. Guldbraa chose her place as far as possible back in the valley where it was narrowest and darkest, and from that day on the place is called Guldbraa's Hill.

Guldbraa never risked passing by Aud's crosses when entering the valley, fearing she might add to their strength. She went to her sacrificial altar, staying for long periods and behaving strangely. When she emerged, she had her eyes covered and carried a chest filled with gold. On its cover, she had her servant attach a large ring that was previously fastened to the altar door.

She mounted her horse, and with the chest before her she rode away, holding the chest by the ring as her stable boy led the horse by the reins.

She had forbidden her people ever to look at the crosses on the slope, but this time, he who led her horse through the pass accidentally looked up at the opposing slope and he stopped for a moment. The way through the pass was hard, but Guldbraa spurred the horse onward and it stumbled. This caused the chest to fall from her grasp, leaving Guldbraa holding only the ring.

Startled, she tore the blindfold from her eyes hoping to see what happened to the chest. Instead, the crosses on the cliff's edge caught her gaze. She cried loudly that an unbearable light was blinding her. She ordered the stable boy to give her the chest, and with all strength to ride ahead.

But the ring from the chest that she still held, she threw far away saying that she would long regret having taken it with her. "Looking back, I now can see," she said, "that the ring is meant for those things that are most repulsive to my thoughts."

Guldbraa continued her ride. But when she had ridden a short distance away from the pass she felt such strong pain in her eyes that when she reached Guldbraa's Hill she could see nothing. Here, she rested a short time, blind and feeling so much pain that she became quite ill. She called for her stable boy, ordering him to lead her to a nearby ravine into which she wanted to let herself pass. She wished to lie where the sun could not be seen and the sound of bells could not be heard.

In the ravine, a northward flowing waterfall fell, behind which was a cave. The ravine was dizzyingly deep, and the waterfall roared and crashed down. Guldbraa entered the cave, laying down on the gold. By entering the waterfall, Guldbraa became a ghost and thereby destroyed the farm on Guldbraa's Hill. Darkness began to set in, and soon neither man nor beast was able to go on living on either Guldbraa's Hill or on the slopes of Hvamm; even the shepherds later believed they saw ghosts there. But as soon as a church was built at Hvamm as Aud had wished, the ghostly happenings stopped.

Today, the place where Guldbraa was brought is called Guldbraa's Ravine and Guldbraa Falls. The ring from the altar door is still on the church door at Hvamm. It is a large, bronze ring and the handgrip is heavily worn.

Beneath the fixtures is an ancient copper plate on which a relief shows two men in battle garb with helmets on their heads, swords at their sides and wearing short armor. One man has thrust a spear into the other man's breast and it protrudes from the man's back.

Local tales of Christianity as well as from various places tell that the priest Thangbrand(11), when he came to Iceland's West Fjords, also came to Hvamm. His preaching fell on deaf ears, and it is said that the woman who lived there stayed indoors and continued her pagan sacrifices while her son Skegge made fun of Thangbrand and his men.

It is told of Skegge that he lived in Hvamm a long time, strengthening heathen beliefs. He was a sorcerer and a heathen through and through just as was his mother, and it was said that he could overpower Guldbraa's ghost, which often killed the shepherds and livestock if they ventured near Guldbraa's Hill. This pleased Skegge little; all the less so since he had always wanted to retrieve Guldbraa's treasure chest from the waterfall. He said often, which was certainly true, that it would be better served to be by him than by a dead ghost.

One sunny day, Skegge prepared himself and traveled to Guldbraa Falls, intending to enter. The way through the valley was far, and it began to get dark before he reached the falls. Two of his servants who went along with him were to hold the line tied to Skegge.

Skegge slipped into the falls, and shortly afterward the servants heard a banging, thunder and other noises; it sounded as though a great battle was occurring behind the falls. They were deathly afraid, and it would have taken little to make them run away. But with a tug, Skegge gave them a sign to pull the line, which they did.

But as Guldbraa's chest reached the lip of the crevasse, they looked purposefully around and it appeared to them that the whole valley all the way down to Hvamm was in flames, and that the flames were spreading from cliff to cliff. This frightened them so that they dropped the line and ran, letting the chest fall back into the falls. But when they had climbed down from the hill, they saw nothing unusual.

Nonetheless, they didn't stop until they had reached the house. Skegge came only later – angry, bruised and bloody and carrying a kettle filled with

gold on his arm that he had filled from Guldbraa's chest and thrown straight up out of the crevasse.

The battle between Guldbraa and Skegge was hard and lasted a long while, and Skegge did not manage to defeat Guldbraa's ghost, which was now more vengeful than ever before. Guldbraa killed Skegge's shepherds, one after the other so that he was unable to get herders. Those who risked it, died.

After his trip into the crevasse, Skegge was no longer himself. The results of his battle and the death of his shepherds weighed heavily on him so that he could only lie in bed. But when things became such that no one would tend the stock, Skegge one day got up and went to his sheep.

A day and a night passed without Skegge returning, but late the following day he came home more dead than alive. No one had risked looking for him, and now he was carrying Guldbraa's chest on his back. He said that her ghost would no longer cause any harm, but that he now would likely follow her to his death.

He returned to his bed and never got up again. Before his death, He wished that the gold in the kettle would be used for material to build a church in Hvamm. He said that the first time when he entered the falls and had wrestled with Guldbraa he had made a promise to his friend Thor(12) but had not kept it.

But this last time when he found himself in even greater danger, he made a promise to donate gold to build a church in Hvamm if he could be rescued from Guldbraa's claws. With this, he saw flames appear in her eyes before he even finished his words she turned to stone there in the crevasse. Still today that stone can be seen in Guldbraa Falls.

But Skegge still did not repent his heathen ways, and wished not to be buried next to the church in Hvamm. Instead, he ordered that he be laid to rest in a mound on the north side of the farm. This was done, and Guldbraa's chest was placed beneath his head. Today, there still stands a large stone called Skegge's Stone. The valley where it stands is called Skeggjadalur (Skegge's Valley) and Guldbraa's Hill is to the south in the same valley.

9. Translator's note: This is a pseudonym for Aud the Deep-Minded (also known as Unn the Deep-Minded). Born Aud Ketilsdottir in 834 and later a widow of a Norse chieftain, she settled in Iceland ca. 870 and claimed extensive areas of land in the Westfjord area. She is mentioned in many

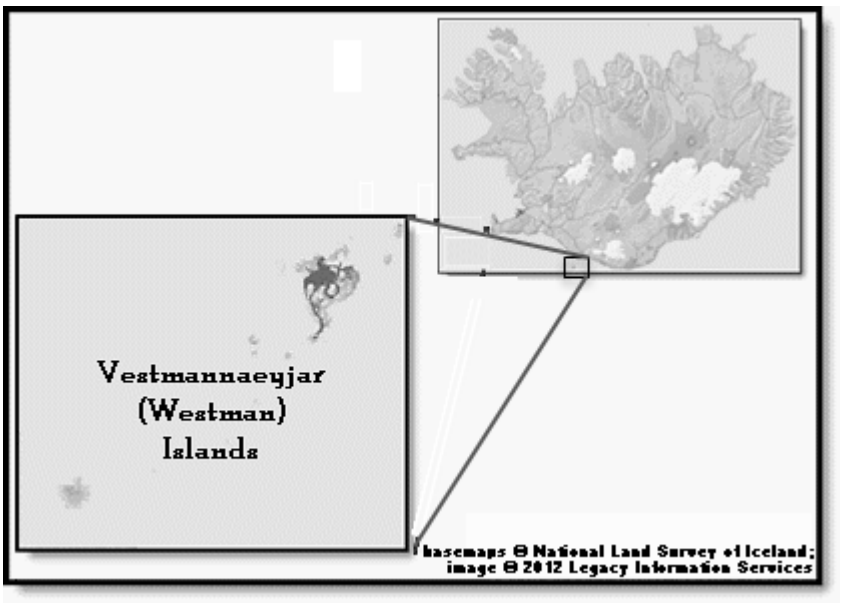
of the Icelandic sagas such as the Book of Settlements (Landnámabók), Njal's Saga and the Saga of Erik the Red (Eiríks saga rauða). In an informative online blog from 4/2011, Emily Lethbridge relates her 4WD trek to Hvamm with pictures of Aud's/Unn's domain as it is today.

10. Translator's note: Tidal measures were important to the Icelanders, particularly in the Westlands where the ebb/flood varies by 15 feet or more. It is believed that the tidal measurements were used for timekeeping in the winter when daylight hours were short.

11. Translator's note: Thangbrand was sent by King Olaf Tryggvason (Olaf I) of Norway to convert the Icelanders to Christianity, but failed. More about Thangbrand is told in "Njal's Saga".

12. This is likely a reference to the Norse god of battle.

Chapter 19. Jon and the Giantess



In the Northland lived a farmer who traveled each fall and winter to fish in the Westman Islands (Vestmannaeyjar). He had a son named Jon, who at the time of this tale was grown. Jon was an optimistic young man. One day, the farmer took Jon with him on a fishing trip to the islands. They went by the most direct route, and nothing is told of their trip or their catch. The following fall, the farmer sent Jon alone southward to the fishing place; the farmer had become old and felt he was no longer strong enough to sail to the islands.

Before Jon left the house, the father told him above all else to avoid resting beneath a high cliff that descended from the mountain slope that lay on his route. He stressed this matter in such a heartfelt way that Jon promised not to pause there, regardless of whatever happened and whatever the weather.

So Jon left with two packhorses and riding another. He planned to graze the horses during the winter on one of the islands, just as his father had done. Nothing more is told of Jon’s trip other than everything went as planned. He came to the mountain slope just as he should, traveling a good while along the slope his father had spoken of. The day was for the most

part spent, and Jon took trouble to get over the slope as his father had implored him to do.

But when he came near the cliffs that his father had told him about, a severe thunderstorm with wind and rain befell him. Just then, he came to a high cliff and saw it as such a welcome place to pause that he could only wish for. It lay on a high point under the cliffs, and had rich grass and shelter from the pouring rain.

He began to question what he should do. This place pleased him, and he could not understand what could be so bad as to keep him from resting here. The result was that he decided to stay. He unharnessed the horses, hobbling their front hooves together.

A short distance away, Jon saw an entrance to a cave above on the cliff. He carried his packs into it, setting them on one side of the cave close to the entrance and making himself comfortable amongst the packs. He then began to eat. It was dark in the cave, and as Jon was deep into his meal he heard repeated howls coming from deeper inside the cave. The howls startled him at first, but he soon regained his courage and, seeking a large fish from his travel provisions, he tore the skin from it. He then spread butter thickly over the whole fish and then recovered it with the skin.

When he was finished with it, he threw the fish as far as he could into the cave while calling to whoever was there that they should take heed and if they liked, they were welcome to the fish. Jon soon heard that the howling stopped and that something began tearing at the fish.

Jon continued his meal and when he was finished, he laid down to rest and sleep. He soon heard how something rustled through the gravel at the cave entrance, and then with heavy steps came inside. He soon saw that it was a large, fat giantess. To him, it appeared as though her whole being glowed in the dark, and this made Jon very uncomfortable.

As the giantess came through the cave entrance, she said, “It smells from man in my cave.” With that, she continued with large steps into the cave, throwing her load down onto the floor. Then there began a roar so strong that the cave shook. Jon then heard the giantess begin to speak with someone inside. He heard her say, “It is better done than not done, and it would be bad when it remains unrewarded.”

Jon watched as she came closer while holding a lighted candle. She then greeted Jon by name, thanking him in the name of her children and invited him to accompany her into the cave. Jon accepted the invitation; the giantess stuck her fingers into the grommets of the harness holding Jon’s pack, carrying it into the cave as well.

As they went deeper into the cave, Jon saw two beds. In one there lay two children; these were the giantess’s children and it was their howling Jon had heard shortly before and it was they who had eaten the fish. But he saw that a pile of trout lay on the floor that the giantess had caught in the evening and had carried home on her back. It was these that had shone in the darkness.

The woman asked Jon where he would like to sleep – in her bed or that of the children. Jon chose the children’s bed. The giantess prepared a place on the floor, put fresh bedclothes on the bed and made it ready for sleeping. Jon laid down to sleep, but soon awoke as the giantess had brought him a meal of cooked trout.

He thanked her for it and while he ate, the giantess sat and chatted with him in an unusually cheerful manner. She asked where he planned to sail, and this he told her. As Jon had no boat, she asked if he had found a place in someone’s boat. Jon answered, “No.” She then told him that all of the boats on the island had full crews, that no one would be able to take someone and that there was no place for him to live except with an old fisherman who no longer landed any fish. He had a boat that was barely usable and a crew of worthless boys because he was no longer able to recruit worthy men.

“I advise you to hire a place on his boat." ” she said. "He will certainly resist taking you on, but you should not give up until he accepts your offer. I cannot reward you as I should for that which you have done for my children,” she continued, “But I have here two fishhooks to give you. One is for you, and the other is for the old fisherman. You two should always fish alone. The hooks will, as I hope, prove worthy of good fishing.

"Also, you should always be the last boat to sail out to fish and be sure to be the first to return in the evening. And do not sail further than before the cliffs that are right in front of the boat landing. Now, when you arrive at Landeyjasandur you will find the last boats that are ready to sail. Try to sail with them to the islands, and tether your horses together on the beach but

please do not ask anyone to care for them and don’t worry about them. I will care for them a bit during the winter.

"And if this all seems highly unlikely that you would have luck fishing in the winter, I would be grateful if you would allow one of my horses to go with yours to carry a few fish for me as I have – as I’ll now confide to you – a great taste for dried fish.”

Jon promised to follow all this advice, and to grant her this wish. The next morning in the gray light Jon left the cave, departing from the giantess amicably. Nothing more is told of his trip until he arrived at Landeyjasandur, the coast from which fishing boats departed.for the islands. There he found the last boats ready to leave. Jon quickly tethered the horses, tying them together on the beach without asking anyone to care for them. The other fishermen mocked Jon for this, saying that the horses would be in very fine condition when the fishing season is over.

But Jon paid no attention to their mocking, instead acting as though he had heard nothing and going ahead with sailing with them to the islands. When he arrived, he sought a place on a boat but found nothing; every boat had people for all the places. Finally, he came to the old fisherman that the old giantess had told him about.

He asked the old man to take him into his crew, saying that he did not want to do harm to a good man. “I cannot catch fishbones, much less fish,” said the old man, “And I have only incapable young boys to care for my miserable boat. I can sail only in the best and quietest weather, and it is not wise for a capable man to bind himself to my incompetence.”

Jon found that it would do harm only to himself, and so he begged the old fisherman so long that he finally took him on. Jon moved in with the old fisherman; the other people did not feel that he had been lucky to accept this place, and made much fun of him.

Now the fishing season came. One morning Jon and the old man awoke and found that all of the fishermen on the island had sailed out in the finest, quietest weather. The old man said, “I don’t know if I should also try to make my boat ready like the others. I doubt that it will be worthwhile.” Jon said that he saw no danger at least to try.

So they put on their leather fishing suits and cast off from the land. But when they were directly opposite from the only docking area, it appeared to

Jon that he recognized the cliffs that the giantess had spoken of. So he asked the old man if it wouldn’t be worth a try right here.

The old man was astounded, saying that it was pointless to try fishing here. So Jon suggested that just for the fun of it, the old man should allow him just once to cast out his line. The old man gave in to Jon's wish.

No sooner had Jon thrown out his line than he pulled in a fish. Jon then handed the other hook, the gift from the giantess, along with the attached line to the old man. In short, it can be told that while fishing on this place they filled their boat three times over, each of them catching sixty exemplary fish for each man. They then sailed back to the land long before the others returned – at which time they had already finished cleaning and dressing their catch.

Everyone was astounded to see how many fish the old man and his crew had caught and asked where there were so many fish. The old man told them, how it was. On the next day, the island people sailed out early, fished opposite the cliffs, but found no signs of life at this place and so sailed further out to sea.

Then Jon and the old man sailed out and again had the same good luck as on the previous day. There is not much more to be said; Jon and the old man sailed out the whole winter long to the place opposite the cliffs and each caught 1200 fish. More than anyone on the island, they had the most luck.

On the day before the end of the season, they again sailed out. This time, when they pulled in their lines, they found that both of their hooks were gone. They both simply thought that the hooks had somehow become loose, thought no more about the matter and sailed back to land.

Now it is told how Jon returned to the mainland with his catch, traveling on the same boat that had brought him to the island the previous fall. During the trip, the crew mocked Jon, saying that his horses would certainly be well fed and ready to carry his dried fish back to the north. But as they approached the mainland, they saw Jon’s horses on the beach, tied together just as they had been left the fall before.

Now, many were curious and wanted to see the horses more closely. They were in no small way surprised to find the horses as spry as though they had been stabled the whole winter long. But in addition to Jon’s horses,

another brown horse stood near them saddled with a sturdily built packsaddle. Jon's companions then were somewhat afraid of him, thinking him a magician, first because of first his great fish catch and now because his horses were – at least as far as they knew – so well cared for.

Jon loaded the dried fish on the horses and then loaded as much on the brown horse as he had on both of his own horses. He then rode alone back north.

Nothing more is told of his ride until he came to the giantess's cave. She welcomed him in a friendly way and he stayed a couple of days with her. He gave her all of the fish that the brown horse had carried. During his stay they talked much of many things. She told him that her children had died during the winter and that she had buried them beneath the cliffs next to her husband.

She also told him that she had taken the hooks from their lines on their last fishing trip, and at the same time she brought his horses to the beach. She then asked Jon if he had heard anything from his home, but he replied, "No". She then told him that she must tell him that during the winter, his father had died and as the only child, he would now have to take over the farm. She said he would move to the farm and in the summer, he would take a wife and would be a very happy man.

Finally, she told him that she had one wish of him. Jon asked what that wish was. The giantess said, "I do not have much time remaining, and I ask you to come here when you dream of me. I ask you to bury me next to my husband and children." She then showed him the place where they were buried.

Afterward, she opened a side room in the cave in which there were two chests filled with gold and all sorts of treasures. She said that he was to inherit these chests and their treasure as well as her brown horse. Before she was to die, she would arrange the chests and place them outside in such a way so that he need only drive the horse between them and then place the harness straps through the grommets and over the packsaddle frame. She said she would place the packsaddle on her brown horse and that he would easily be able to carry the chests with nothing more to do until he came back to the Northlands.

Jon and the giantess then parted with great affection. Nothing more is told of his trip north other than that everything went well until his arrival in the north. There, he found everything just as the giantess had said. Everything happened just as she had predicted. Jon took over his father's farm, inheriting it as his own.

Early that same summer he married a farmer's daughter from nearby. The time came when the meadow had to be mowed, and nothing out of the ordinary happened. One night, Jon dreamed of the giantess, immediately remembered her wish to him, and got out of bed. It was a dark night with storm and rain. Jon told his stableboy to bring both of his riding horses, and this the boy immediately did.

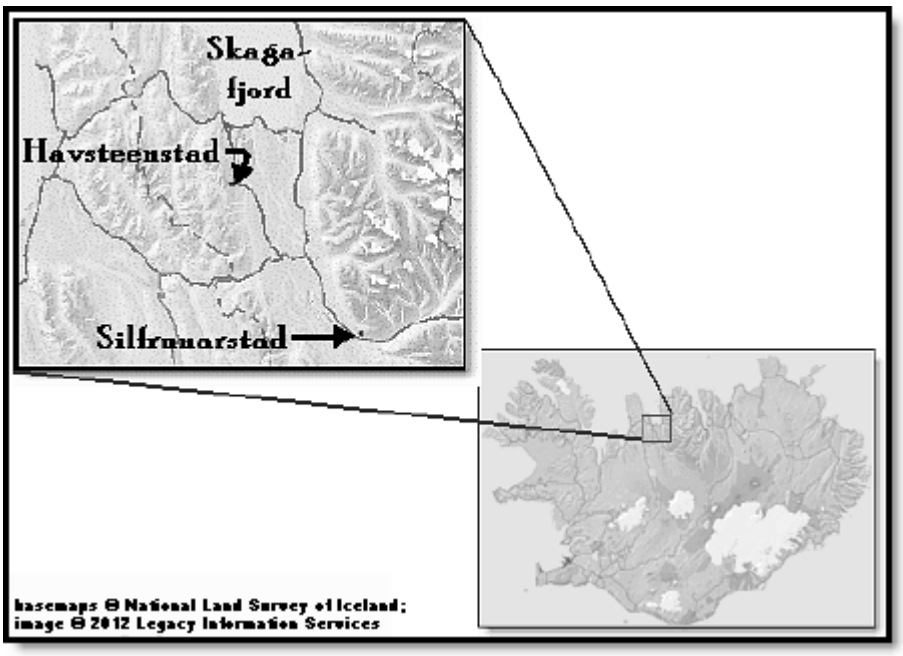
Jon prepared the horses for the ride. Fearful, Jon's wife asked him why he must leave in the middle of the night and in such weather. He told her little, but asked her not to concern herself for him even if he would be gone for a few days. He then left, riding as quickly as his horses could run.

All went well, and he finally came to the cave. The giantess was standing outside, but was only able to speak a few words to him. He stayed by her until she had given up her soul. He then buried her at the place she had chosen.

He took the brown horse that stood already harnessed with the packsaddle. In front of the cave stood the two chests fixed with straps through their metal rings. Jon led the horse between them, looped the straps over the saddle's wood frame and then rode away with everything behind him.

His trip back north was uneventful. Jon lived long and in peace on the farm that he had inherited from his father, was very successful and enjoyed great respect from everyone. More from this tale, I cannot tell.

Chapter 20. Ketil of Silfrunarstad



In a time long past, a farmer whose name is unknown lived on Silfrunarstad (now Silfrastaðir, private) in Skagefjord. The farmer had many sheep. The land there was outstanding for raising sheep, and the farmer happily let his herd graze on a hut roof on the mountain, and sometimes much farther away. This went on for a long time without anything unusual occurring, and the farmer lived a quiet life there.

Then, one Christmas Eve night, it happened that the farmer's herd was being driven past the Grimshöi on the way home where the farmer waited for them, as always, to appear any moment. He made a practice of helping the shepherds drive in the sheep, and so kept watch for them.

A long while later when he thought that they should now have been home, he decided to go look for them himself. Instead of being on the way home, the sheep were where they always were. So the farmer sent other people to drive the sheep home. His shepherd was nowhere to be found.

The night passed and he did not return. So the farmer had to send someone else to watch over the sheep. People looked for the shepherd, but he was nowhere to be seen. At first, they all had suspicions over his

disappearance, but as time passed the people spoke less and less of it as is usually the case when time has passed.

Nothing unusual happened until the next Christmas season. But on Christmas Eve when the herd was to pass by Grimshöi it instead just remained there and things occurred just as in the previous year. The farmer became very worried over this, giving a lot of thought to the disappearance of his herders.

Talk began anew about the matter, and people found that things were not what they should be. The farmer found very few who would look after his sheep, and it became difficult for him to find people to work for him.

But the next spring he was able to hire a young man whose name was Ketil. He was eighteen years old and was strong and brave. That fall, he took over guarding the sheep, driving them to the meadow where they had always been before. Christmas came, and on Christmas Eve day the weather was pleasant so Ketil drove the sheep to the meadow as always. The farmer intended to watch more closely as the sheep were returning and as soon as it was possible, to watch out for Ketil.

So when darkness was falling the farmer left the house and watched for the sheep. When he found that there was again no sign of them, he went back inside. After a short time he came back outside, and saw that the sheep had come as far as Grimshöi. The farmer immediately went there, but Ketil was nowhere to be seen.

This was a painful event for the farmer, as it was as unpleasant for him to lose Ketil as all of the others. He also now believed deep in his heart that no one would ever watch over his sheep again in the future.

As for Ketil, it can be told that as the day was over he drove his sheep in a large scattered heard along the cliff edge toward home. As he came near Grimshöi, he saw a gigantic form emerge from a mountain crevasse directly opposite the farm at Silfrunarstad. At this place, there is a small cliff that had torn away from the larger cliffs forming a opening called “the Ravine”.

Ketil saw the monster heading for the sheep, which gathered in fear around Ketil. As it came closer, Ketil saw that it was an unbelievably large troll woman. She called to Ketil, asking him for a sheep for the Christmas celebration. Ketil found the matter difficult, and told the troll woman that the sheep were not his and that he had only one sheep of his own, a two-

day-old lamb. He showed it to her and told her that she could take it if she liked. In no time, the troll woman took the lamb, bound it by the horns and threw it over her shoulder. Then suddenly, she came toward Ketil, scooped him up in her arms and returned toward the ravine, the same way that she had come.

When she had passed through and then emerged from the Ravine, she made her way alongside the mountain with large strides. Ketil could see that it was useless to writhe and twist since he could hardly move. She continued on her way until she reached the crevasse near the stream at Bolstad where there was a large waterfall in the mountains. This mountain pass is virtually impassable, but the troll woman climbed up to her cave behind the waterfall.

Here, she released Ketil and threw the lamb onto the floor of the cave. She then asked Ketil to slaughter the lamb and prepare it for them to eat. She said that she wanted it for a Christmas feast for herself and Ketil. With that, she placed a kettle on the fire and quickly cooked the meal.

She then began to eat voraciously, letting Ketil partake as well. She told him that she was the reason that shepherds disappeared from Silfrunarstad, and that in each of the previous years she came to them on Christmas Eve and asked them to give her a sheep for her to prepare for Christmas Eve dinner.

She said that they were surly with her, and scolded her soundly, so she tried to bargain with them. But now, Ketil dealt with her request in a friendly manner, and he would now become a very happy man even though he had even less to give her than the previous herders did. She told him that his employer would pass away in February and that he would take over the farm, settling there in the following spring.

But Ketil said that he would be unable to take over the farm, first because the fields are large and difficult and second because he had no money to buy the farm. In addition, he had no housekeeper and no staff.

To this, she answered that he would receive money because within the month, she would die and he would inherit everything of value in her cave; so he would not lack the money to settle at Silfrunarstad. She had only one request, she said, and that was for him to attend to her in a month. If possible, he was to lay her body under the waterfall.

She told him that the property of his employer would be sold in the coming spring. Ketil should then buy what he needs with money that he should take from her cave. He should employ the same staff now at Silfrunarstad, and should court the daughter of the priest from Havsteenstad.

Ketil found, however, that this was poor advice since he was a poor, uneducated man. But she told him not to be fearful. “Because I have a belt here,” she said, “and you should fasten it around her hips. It has the ability to make her love you when she has it on. With it, everything will be good.” Ketil saw that the belt was also an unusual treasure.

Ketil now wanted to return home; he was sure that his employer was grieving over his absence. The giant woman said that there was no reason to worry and told him to wait until the next morning. This he agreed to do, and so on the next morning she accompanied him out through the waterfall, showed him how to return into the cave and let him try it himself. This, he was able to do.

She then wished him well, telling him that they would not see each other often. She wished him all conceivable happiness, assuring him that most things he would wish for would be his and that now would be the start of his good fortune. Then they parted with great friendship; she returned to her cave while Ketil hurried as quickly as he could toward home.

When Ketil arrived home, he found that the farmer had taken to bed from grief over Ketil’s disappearance. But now everyone was happy, especially the farmer, who sprang from his bed and thought that he himself had brought Ketil back from Hell. He asked Ketil the reason for his disappearance, but Ketil spoke very little about it. He mentioned neither the giantess nor anything of her cave. Ketil then returned to tending the sheep as before.

After a month, Ketil returned to the cave and went in. There, he found the giantess dead. With a firestarter he carried with him, he lighted a candle and then carried her body out of the cave. Later, he told that he had never had such a test of his strength. He then examined the cave and found a great store of valuable items and gold. But he left everything there for the time being and returned home.

In February, the farmer became ill. After taking to bed for two weeks, he died. Ketil then requested to lease the farm, but the owner refused; he thought it the greatest foolishness to lease Ketil the farm and also refused to let him lease any other.

New Year approached, and the inheritors sold most of the furnishings at Silfrunarstad. Ketil bought most of the things, paying immediately. He also had retained most of the farm staff and now found it easy to lease the farm.

In the spring, Ketil traveled north to Havsteenstad (Hafsteinstaðir, private) where for the first time he met the priest's daughter. He gave her the belt, putting it around her waist. He then presented his proposal and said he was there to ask for her hand. She appeared to him to be pretty and filled with hope, and wearing the belt sparked love in her heart so that she accepted his proposal if her father also agreed.

Ketil then approached her father, asking for his daughter's hand. The priest reacted coolly, and it was noticeable that he felt Ketil, a farmer through and through, was not worthy of his daughter. But since Ketil was now wealthier than most believed, and since the priest was a clever and especially ambitious man he allowed himself to be convinced and gave his blessing. With that, she accompanied Ketil home as his housekeeper.

Ketil returned home with the priest's daughter, where they became a good match. In the fall, her father came and the result was Ketil became formally engaged. Later that fall they were married in a grand ceremony. They loved each other very much, and lived at Silfrunarstad into old age.

Ketil had good fortune in everything so that no one could recall that a wealthier man ever lived at Silfrunarstad. He always had enough money from the giantess' cave as long as he kept his home in good order. And, Ketil told this story himself as an old man. It remained in people's memories and has been passed down from father to son.

Chapter 21. “Trunt, Trunt and the Mountain Trolls!”

Two men were once in the mountains, gathering moss. One night they both lay in their tent, one asleep while the other lay awake. Suddenly, he saw the sleeping comrade get up and leave the tent. So he got up and went after him, running so fast that he was not able to close the distance between them.

The sleeping comrade headed toward a nearby glacier, and the pursuer saw in the distance a giant sitting above them on the jagged peak of glacial ice. The giant was stretching his arms out and back to its chest, first one and then the other, repeatedly. In this way, he magically drew the sleeping man to him until he could embrace him. With that, the giant ran away carrying the sleeping man with him.

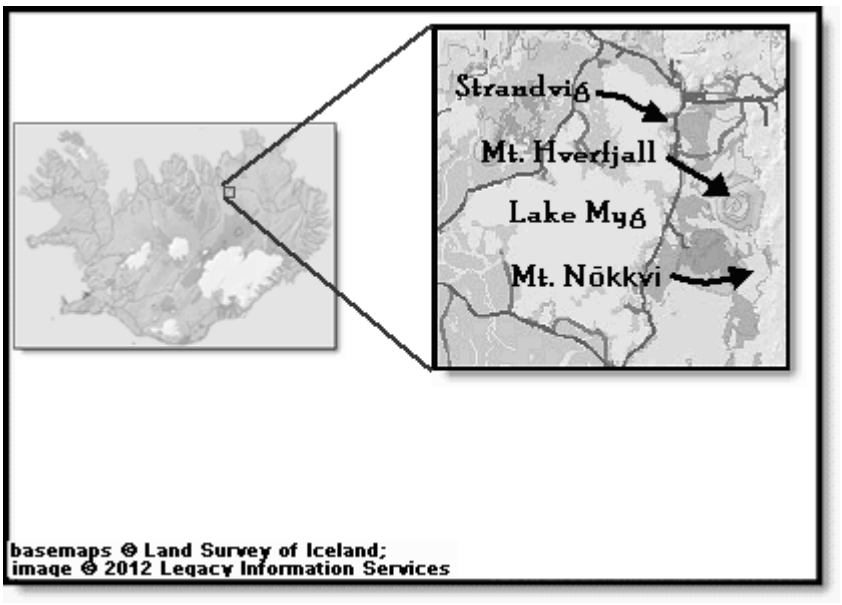
The next year, people from the area were again on the same place in the mountains, gathering moss. The man who had been captured came to them, but was quiet and spoke so little that the people were unable to get a word from him. The people asked him, “Who do you believe in?” He answered, “God”, and then left for the mountains from where he had come.

In the second year after his kidnapping by the giant, he came again to the same place where the same people were gathering moss. This time, he resembled a troll so much that the people were afraid. Still, he was asked, “Who do you believe in?” But this time he said nothing, and remaining not as long as the year before, staying for only a short while before he returned to the mountains.

In the third year, he again came to where the people gathered moss. But now, he had become a real troll with a horrible demeanor and appearance. Most people were horrified, but one still mustered the courage to ask him once more, “Who do you believe in?” This time, he replied, “Trunt, Trunt and the mountain trolls!” With that answer, he suddenly disappeared and was never seen again.

For many years thereafter, no one dared to collect moss at that same place.

Chapter 22. The Night Troll



Translator's note: This is the legend of the tailed troll or giantess of Lake Myg (Mÿvatn, or Midgefly Lake) known now as the giantess of Skessuhalli and later as the ghost of Lake Myg, "Myvatnsskotta". Her petrified form is said to sit atop her boat, now Mt. Nökkvi, and her tail comprises the hills to the north, including Mount Hverfjall

On the summer meadow belonging to the farmers of Lake Myg there lived in the old days a giantess who lived in the mountains named "The Giantess's Tail", after her. She was a night troll whose nature it was not to be able to see the sun and so always did her work at night.

This giantess caused much damage to the local residents, among which was stealing the fish from Lake Myg. It is said that she rowed around the lake in a little boat that she then carried home on her back.

One summer, the people were having good fishing at Strandvig in Lake Myg. This place was known then as now as the best for fishing on the lake. The whole summer, the giantess made a habit of coming to the bay at night to steal all the fish. This, of course, pleased the people living on the beach very little.

One evening in late summer, she came down to the lake, as usual, to fish. When she came down, she saw a farmer busy fishing in the bay. Thinking

that she was not strong enough to attack the farmer, who was fishing with three other men, she decided to wait until they were done fishing.

But the farmer remained where he was, perhaps because he knew how things were for the giantess if the morning light began to appear. So the giantess became impatient, but did not want to return home with nothing accomplished.

Finally, the farmer stopped fishing, and the giantess went down to the beach and pulled nets out of the bay. When she had finished this work, she turned toward home. But when she was halfway home, the sun came up. The story goes that she put her boat down at the place she was when the sun came up, and at this place everything she had was changed to stone.

Traces of this are still clearly to be seen there today. The boat still stands on a hill that is between the Giantess's Tail mountains and Lake Myg, and is known still as Boat Hill (Nökkvi). The stone boat is built just as the boats that are still used on Lake Myg with the only difference being that the stone boat is larger.

One can clearly recognize the stone boat's form, and the oars are plain to see as well as where they sat as well as cuts in the boat's side in place of the oarlocks used nowadays. In the boat's stern one can see a large mound. This, people believe, is where the giantess found her final rest.

Chapter 23. The Spirit’s Nightcap

At a place where there now stands a church, there lived among other people a young man and a maid. The young man made a habit of scaring the maid, but she had become so used to this that she gradually was no longer able to be scared, believing that whatever she saw was done by him to frighten her.

It happened one day that the laundry was being washed, among which were a number of white nightcaps that people often wore in those days. That evening, the maid was asked to retrieve the laundry from the churchyard where it was drying. She went there and began to gather the laundry.

When she was almost finished, she saw what appeared to be a white spirit sitting on one of the graves. Thinking that the young man was again trying to frighten her and believing he sat there with a nightcap on, she went to the place where it sat and tore the cap from its head and said, “It will not work to frighten me this time!”

She then returned with the laundry, only to find the young man in the house. The laundry was then counted and it was found that there was one nightcap too many, one of which had an earthy, unclean odor. This greatly frightened the maid.

The next morning the spirit sat on the grave, and the people had no idea what to do. No one was brave enough to bring the nightcap back to him. They sought counsel from others in the neighboring villages, and found an old man in the area who seemed to know what to do.

He thought that it was only possible for the young maid to return the nightcap to the spirit and in the presence of many, to put the cap back on the spirit’s head while saying nothing. He said that if this was not done, that there could be bad results for everyone.

The people urged the maid to place the nightcap back on the spirit’s head. This, she agreed to do and with her heart in her throat she placed the cap on the ghost’s head. She could not resist, and said, “Now are you satisfied?!”

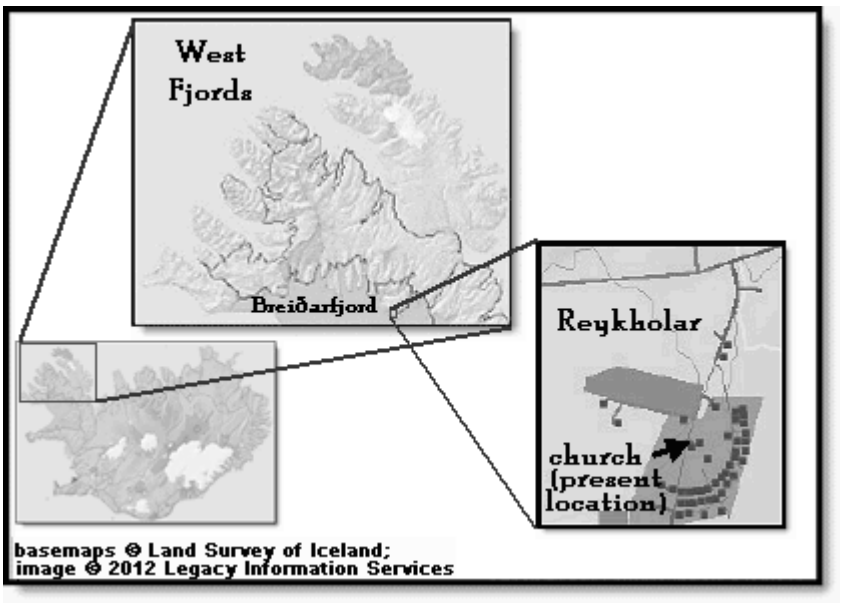
The spirit turned toward her, struck her and said, “Yes, and are you also happy?” and then immediately fell back into his grave. The maid collapsed

from the blow and the people watching ran immediately to her and lifted her up. But she was dead.

The people chastised the young man for having scared the maid so often for they believed it was because of this that the completely unhappy matter happened. From that time on, he no longer scared people.

And with that, this story ends.

Chapter 24. The Groom and the Ghost



Four men were busy one day, digging a grave. Some say that it was at the Reykholar churchyard. They were all in good spirits, but one of them was the most spirited of all.

When the grave became deeper, there appeared a number of human bones. Among them was a thighbone that had belonged to gigantically large man. The most spirited man took the bone, looked at it carefully and then placed it next to his own thigh. As the tale goes, the bone reached from the sole of his boot to his hip, even though he was a good-sized man.

While measuring, he is to have joked, “It wouldn’t be wrong to say that this fellow was a good wrestler, and it would be fun to have him as a guest whenever I get married.” The others agreed with him but said nothing further. The joker then put the thighbone back with the others.

First after five years, it is told that this same man became engaged to a maid, and the second announcement of marriage had been made. It was learned that the bride dreamt three nights in a row that a horribly big man came into her bed. He asked her if her groom thought about what he once said two years earlier in jest to him. On the last night, she dreamt that he also said they would not escape from what he had said then – that he would

be a guest at the wedding feast. The maid did not answer, but her dream was so sinister and frightening when she saw how big the man was.

Only after the third night of dreaming did she tell her groom about the dream. That morning, she told him, “Who did you think of inviting to our wedding, my dear?”

“I really don’t know, my love,” he answered, “I haven’t really given it any thought; I first wanted to complete the customary three announcements.”

“So, until now you have not invited anyone?” she asked. He answered that as far as he could remember, he had invited no one. Still, he began to think about it because it seemed strange to him that she was so eager when asking him. After thinking about it, he said that he had not invited anyone; nonetheless, a couple of years past he had made a joke about the thighbone of a dead man dug from a grave, saying that it would probably be fun to have such a huge man as guest at his wedding. But that no one could suggest that he had invited anyone.

But his bride became serious, saying such a joke was not appropriate, most of all over the bones of the departed. “So now I can tell you that he about whom you made your fun now seriously intends to appear as a guest at your wedding!” With that, she then related her dreams, including the threat that the man had made in her last dream. This upset her groom greatly and he agreed that was quite right saying that it would have been better when he had held his tongue with such a joke.

He went to bed that evening as always. During the night it appeared to him as though he saw a hugely big man resembling a giant with an unfriendly and brusque manner come to him and ask if he was now willing to honor the promise he had given five years earlier; namely, to have him as a guest at his wedding.

The groom was very upset and answered that it probably must be honored. The ghost said that he could not change matters, whether he liked it or not, that it would be pointless for him to busy himself with his bones and it would serve the groom right if he got a taste of what it was like. The ghost then departed from his dream and the groom slept until the next morning.

He told his bride of his dream, and asked her what she thought he should do. She said that he should arrange for builders and enough wood to be brought, and quickly to have a house built that would fit the man who had visited them in their dreams. The house had to be large enough for him to stand up in. The inside walls must be as long as the height to the roof rafters.

The walls should then be hung with decorative covers as one does with a wedding hall. The guest's table must be covered with a white cloth. Consecrated earth must be placed on a platter and he must be served a bottle of water; he will not eat anything else. A chair must be set before the table, and a bed must be provided in case he has the desire to rest. Finally, three candles must be placed on the table.

The groom must lead the guest into the house, being careful to go before him but above all never to be with him under the same roof. He must also avoid accepting any invitation from the man, should it be offered. The groom must talk with the man as little as possible. He should leave the man after offering the prepared meal to him, being sure to close the door behind him. So the groom did exactly as his bride had stated. He had a freestanding house of the right size built and furnished it as she had told him.

The wedding day came and the wedding was done in the usual manner. Everyone took their places at the table, and as darkness came, everyone again stood up from the table without anything unusual occurring. Some of the guests then went into the wedding hall and walked back and forth while others sat by their beakers and talked. The bride and groom sat quietly, as was the custom.

Then, there came a sudden hard knocking at the door, but no one had the courage to open it. The bride tugged softly on her groom's arm, whose face looked as pale as death. A short time passed and again came the knock at the door, this time much harder than before. The bride took her groom by the hand and led him, even though he pulled against her, to the door and opened it.

There stood a horribly large man who said that he had now come as a wedding guest. The bride pushed her groom softly out of the wedding hall so that he could receive the man. She then closed the hall door again, asking God to give him strength.

The story goes on to say that the groom escorted the huge guest to the house that had been prepared for him, directing the guest into the house. The guest asked the groom to enter first, but the groom refused. The end then happened that the huge stranger entered the house first. He then told the groom that from this moment, on, he should never touch the bones of a dead man.

The groom acted as though he heard nothing the stranger said, and instead offered the prepared meal on the platter to the guest for his satisfaction although not thinking it unseemly if he did not remain with the guest. The guest asked the groom to come inside for only a moment, but the groom refused. The ghost then said, “Since you have no time to remain with me here or to come inside, I hope that you will give me the pleasure of being my guest in return.”

But the groom refused the invitation flatly, left and closed the door soundly. He then returned to the wedding hall where he found that things were somewhat quiet, since everyone had become somber from the events that had just occurred. Only the bride sat there with a cheerful demeanor. The guests then drifted off home, one after the other. The bridal couple then went to bed and slept until morning.

The next morning, the groom wanted to look in on the guest who had come the night before. But the bride said that he should not make a step toward there unless she was with him. So the pair went toward the guest’s house, she going first, and they opened the door.

Inside, they found no trace of the guest. The bottle of water was empty and the earth that was on the platter was scattered over the floor. “I thought this might happen,” said the bride. “If you had gone ahead of me and if you had stepped on this earth, you would have fallen under the power of the ghost and would never have been able to come back to this world. But it does me no harm to walk here, so I will sweep and clean the house.”

Others tell that when it was ready to leave, the ghost went to the door either of the wedding hall or of the couple’s bedroom and sang:

“My thanks you have not earned

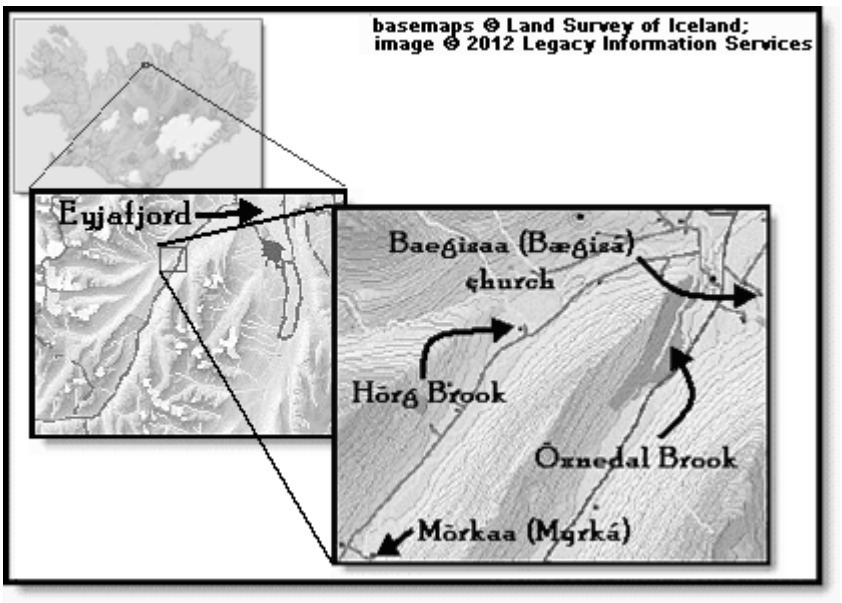
for the feast upon the table;

My drink was water fresh,

My meal but earth and clay”

From that day, on, the ghost never again visited them, and they lived long together in love and happiness.

Chapter 25. The Sexton of Mörkaa



In the old days, a church sexton lived on Mörkaa in Oefjord (Eyjafjord). His name is not known, but he was a good friend of a maid named Gudrun who according to some lived at Baegisaa on the other side of the Hörg Brook where she was a priest's housemaid. The sexton had a horse with a grey mane that he called Faxe, which he always rode.

One day shortly before Christmas, the sexton rode to Baegisaa to invite Gudrun to celebrate Christmas at Mörkaa. He promised to come for her at a certain time and to accompany her to the feast on the day before Christmas Eve.

On the days before the sexton made the journey, there had been much snow, and ice had formed on the seas and lakes. Then, on the day that he traveled to Baegisaa, thawing set in and the Hörg Brook became impassable with ice floes and flooding. Nonetheless, the sexton began his journey late in the day with little thought to what may be and thinking that the river was unchanged from that morning.

There was a bridge over the Öxnedal Brook, but when he came to Hörg Brook it had risen greatly and had broken through the ice banks. He rode along the brook until he was opposite Saurbær farm, the next farm below Mörkaa where a bridge crossed the brook. Here he rode down onto the

bridge, but he had hardly reached its midpoint before it collapsed and he fell into the raging water.

The next morning, the farmer from Tuevold rose from bed to see a saddled horse standing on his property that appeared to be the sexton's Faxe. The farmer thought to himself that he had seen the sexton preparing to leave the day before, be he had not noticed him return. With that, he soon suspected what had happened.

The farmer went out to the field, finding that indeed it was Faxe standing there soaking wet and in a desperate state. The farmer then went down along the brook to the so-called Tuevold Snows. There, he found the sexton just above the peninsula where he was washed up, dead.

The farmer went immediately to Mörkaa and told what he had found. People went to where the sexton's body was lying and found that the back of his head was crushed by the ice floes. They brought him back to Mörkaa, and during the week before Christmas he was buried.

In the time since the sexton had left Baegisaa until the day before Christmas Eve, no news of the happenings at Mörkaa had reached Baegisaa because of the continuing thaw and severe flooding. On the day before the feast, the weather had changed so that the raging brook waters had dropped. With that, Gudrun had hopes of going to the Christmas feast in Mörkaa.

Toward the evening, Gudrun began to prepare herself. When she was almost finished dressing she heard someone knock at the door. Another maid who was with her opened the door but saw no one outside. It was neither clear and bright nor dark, since the moon was behind the clouds that drifted unceasingly before it.

The maid came back inside and said that she saw nothing. But Gudrun said, "It is probably meant for me, so I'll go outside." She had in the meantime finished preparing herself and needed only to put on her cape. This, she took and pulled up over her one arm while throwing the other arm over her shoulder, holding it tight.

Outside, she saw Faxe standing in front of her door along with a man she took to be the sexton. If they spoke with each other, no one can say. But the man lifted Gudrun onto the horse, then mounted the horse ahead of her.

They rode for a while without speaking, coming eventually to Hörg Brook where large blocks of ice had built up in layers. As the horse sprang over the ice blocks, the sexton’s hood rose from his head and Gudrun could see his bare skull.

At that moment, the clouds again drifted in front of the moon; then he spoke:

“The moon drifts, and so ride the dead

Do you not see the white of my head

Garun, Garun?”(13)

This upset Gudrun greatly, but some say that she said nothing. Others say that Gudrun lifted his hood to reveal the white of his skull, and that she then said; “Now I know from where you come.”

No more is told of their talk or the ride until the came to the body gate(14) of the church at Mörkaa, where they dismounted. He then said to Gudrun:

“Now, you wait here, Garun, Garun

until I lead Faxe, Faxe

farther along the wall, the wall.”

He then led the horse away. She chanced to look inside the churchyard and was horrified to see an open grave. The thought then came to her to alarm everyone by pulling on the bell’s cord, but just then, someone grabbed her from behind. To her good fortune, she hadn’t had the chance to pull both arms of her cloak on. He grasped her so hard that the loose arm of the cloak tore in half.

The last Gudrun saw of the sexton was that while holding the remnants of her cloak, he threw himself into the open grave, after which the heaped earth on both sides fell back on its own, filling the grave.

Terrified, Gudrun rang the bell until the people of Mörkaa came out and got her, as she was now so paralyzed with fright that she could neither stop ringing nor bring herself to leave the churchyard. She now knew that she had been dealing with the sexton’s ghost although she had no knowledge of his death. This became a certainty when she talked with the people of Mörkaa and learned of the sexton’s death while telling them of their ride.

Later that night, when everyone had returned to bed and all the lamps were put out, the sexton came back again, raging with such fury after Gudrun that everyone again was awakened and no one was able to close an eye until morning. Even a half month later, Gudrun was unable to remain alone, and each night someone had to stand watch over her. Yes, some even say that the local priest himself had to sit at her bedside and read from the hymnal.

Finally, a sorcerer from west of Skagefjord was sent for. When he came, he ordered that a large boulder lying above Mörkaa farm be dug up and rolled onto the door gable of the sleeping house. In the evening as it became dark, the sexton's ghost returned and tried to enter the house. The sorcerer caught him south of the door and using many oaths, forced him back into the grave and then rolled the boulder over him. To this day, the sexton still lies there in his grave.

After this time, the ghost of Mörkaa no longer came back, and Gudrun recovered again. Later, she returned home to Baegisaa but people said that she was never quite the same as before.

13. Garun = Gudrun. In folklore, ghosts are unredeemed souls and so are forbidden from speaking "Gud" (God's name) or any words containing God's name, such as Gudrun.

14. Translator's note: In Icelandic, "sàluhlid", a covered gate through which bodies are brought into the church. Also known as the lychgate or corpse gate.

Chapter 26. Sigurd and the Ghost

A farmer lived on an estate with his son Sigurd. Everyone thought that Sigurd was an unusual soul. People liked him little, but he was thought such a virtuous person as to be indispensable for the estate.

One day, a man also named Sigurd came to the estate. He asked the farmer if he could remain there for the winter, and was given permission to do so. The stranger was unable to do more than play the harp. The two Sigurds became such good friends that the farmer's son wished to do nothing more than remain with the stranger.

The winter passed and in the spring, the guest left. After he had gone, the farmer's son was bored with everything so that he could no longer stay. In the fall, he left to look for Sigurd. He went to every farm, from village to village and from county to county asking after his namesake friend.

Finally, he came to a vicarage. He was told that a short time before a man named Sigurd had come to the vicarage and had only just died. This Sigurd asked where the dead Sigurd was, and was told that his body was outside in the cookhouse where he had just been placed in a coffin. He asked permission to see the dead man, and after gaining it he spent the whole night sitting by the coffin.

That night, the dead Sigurd got out of his coffin, went out and stayed away for some time. Nonetheless, Sigurd the farmer's son stayed the whole night by the coffin.

It so happened that the vicar's wife had recently given birth to a child at the vicarage. As morning approached, the ghost came back again and wanted to get back in the coffin. The farmer's son said he could not unless he was told what the ghost had done all night. "I played with my money," said the ghost. "And now I wish to return to my coffin," he continued.

"No, not until you tell me where the money is," said Sigurd the farmer's son. "You will never learn that," said the ghost. "Then you cannot return to your coffin," replied Sigurd. So the ghost told Sigurd that the money was under the corner of the bath house.

"How much money is there?" asked Sigurd.

"A bushel," replied the ghost.

“Were you up to anything else?” asked Sigurd. “No,” replied the ghost.

Not believing him, Sigurd said, “You definitely have been up to some other mischief. You cannot return to your coffin until you tell me what you have done.”

“I killed the vicar’s wife,” said the ghost. “Why?” asked Sigurd.

“I wanted to be her friend while she was alive,” said the ghost, “but she didn’t want that.”

“How did you manage it?” asked Sigurd. “I drove all of the life that was in her into her little finger,” replied the ghost.

“Can’t she be brought back to life?” asked Sigurd.

“Yes,” answered the ghost, “if the string that I tied around her little finger is loosened so that her blood does not flow. But now, I want to get into my coffin.”

“Not before you promise me never again to leave your coffin,” answered Sigurd.

“I want to get in my coffin,” said the ghost.

“First, promise me what I asked,” answered Sigurd.

The result of all this was, the ghost promised never again to leave the coffin. With that, the ghost laid back down in the coffin, which closed itself again.

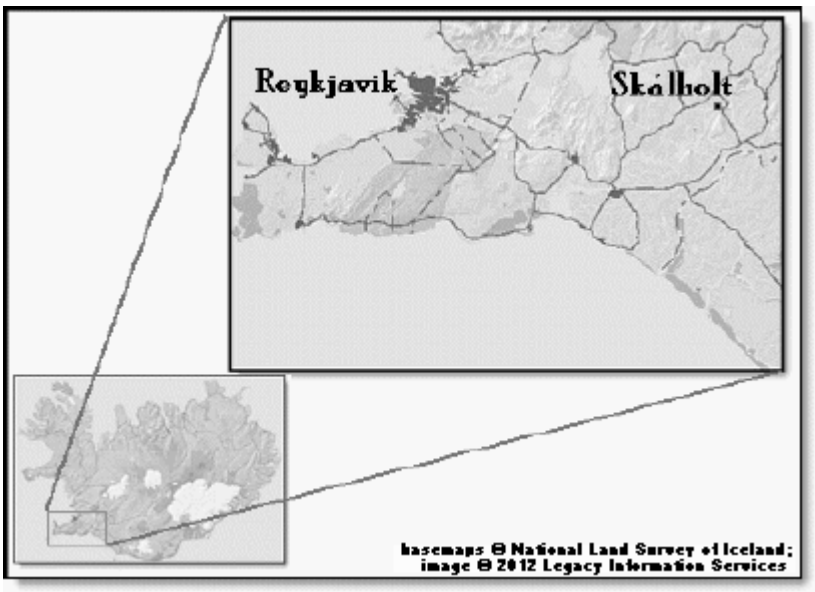
The next morning, Sigurd went out into the farmyard and met the people who were now in mourning. He asked them what was the matter, and they told him that the vicar’s wife died during the night.

He asked permission to see her, and they showed him where she was lying. Finding the string around her little finger, he loosened and removed it. Then he stroked her body until she returned to life. He then told the vicar of his dealings with the ghost, showing the vicar the money to prove his story.

The vicar held Sigurd in very high esteem, taking him into his service and, as it was told, making a very competent man of him. From that day on, Sigurd always led a good life.

And so ends the story.

Chapter 27. The Brave Youth



There was once a very stubborn youth who had no fear of anything. His family, whether parents or relatives, were very worried; whatever they did with him, there was nothing that would frighten him. When they had finally given up on him they brought him to a priest who they felt was from everyone the best one to make something of him and to tame his bravery.

When the young man came to the priest, he soon showed the same; there was nothing that he feared regardless of what the priest did to frighten him. He also showed the same defiance and boldness as he did earlier with others.

Some time passed and the youth stayed with the priest, who went to much trouble trying to find a way to frighten him. But everything he tried failed. One day that winter, three bodies were brought to the church for burial. Because they had been brought late in the day, the bodies were placed in the church for burial the next day.

In those days, the custom was not to bury the dead in coffins, and so it was that these dead were clothed only in burial dress. When they were brought to the church, the priest had the bodies placed across the aisle between the pews near the front of the church, side by side, but with a bit of room between each of them. During the evening, the priest said to the

young man, “Please go for a moment over to the church, my boy, and get me the book that is lying on the altar.”

Immediately, the youth obeyed the priest. Of all things, he was not disobedient, even though hardheaded. He went over to the church, unlocked the door and started to walk down the center aisle. But as he had gone only a short way from the door, he stumbled over something that he had kicked with his foot.

Still, he was not frightened. He reached down and felt around with his hands, and finding that he had stumbled over a body he took it and slid it between the pews on one side of the aisle. He then walked further inside, only to fall again over another body. This he handled in the same manner as the first. Again, he walked ahead until he tripped over the third body and again he heaved it between the seats at the side.

Going on to the altar, he took the book and after closing the church door, he took the book back to the priest. Taking the book, the priest asked the youth if he noticed anything. The youth answered, “No”, showing no signs of fear. So the priest asked him, “Didn’t you notice the bodies that were lying in the aisle?”

The young man replied, “Oh, right. Yes, the bodies. I did notice them; I didn’t understand what the Holy Father had meant.”

“Well, then. And how was it that you noticed them?” said the priest. “Weren’t they in your way?”

“Oh, it’s not worth talking about,” said the youth.

“But then, what did you do to get through the aisle?” asked the priest.

“I lifted them up from the floor and placed them between the pews, and they’re still lying there.”

The priest shook his head, but spoke no more with the youth about the matter. In the morning when everyone was up, the priest said to the boy, “You will have to leave; I do not want you in my house any longer because you are so disrespectful and have no shame about disturbing the peace of those who are in eternal sleep.”

The youth responded politely and did not argue; instead, he simply bid the priest and the people at the vicarage good-bye. After that the youth

wandered for a time with no place to rest his head. But at one farm where he stayed overnight, he overheard that the bishop of Skalholt had died.

Making a detour on his way, he wandered to Skalholt. The day was already ending when he arrived, so he asked for a place to stay for the night. He was given the answer that his wish would be granted but that he must care for his own safety.

Finding this curious, he asked if it would bring evil if he stayed there, and if so then what that evil might be. The people replied that since the death of the bishop, things had so changed there that no one could stand to remain there because of the ghosts that appeared as soon as darkness set in, and since that time everyone had to flee at night.

“Then I choose to remain here,” said the youth. The people of the estate pleaded with him not to talk that way, because it really would not be any pleasure for him to remain there.

When it was dark, the people slowly began to leave, and with heavy hearts and because they did not expect to see him again, they wished the young man well. But the youth stayed behind and was in exceptionally good spirits. He went inside and looked through the house. The last place he came to was the kitchen. Here, he found the household was well appointed; many plump mutton shanks hung in a row, and everything else he saw was equally sumptuous.

It had been some time since he saw any dried fish, and so he began to yearn for it. He had no interest in sleeping as he wished to see the reputed spirit. So he decided to start a fire; he then broke some wood into small pieces and placed a pot of water over the fire. He then cut up some of the mutton, laying it in the pot.

So far, he saw no sign of a ghost. But when everything had been placed in the pot, he heard a dull voice coming out of the chimney saying, “Can I fall?” The youth replied, “Why shouldn’t you fall?” Then, the top part of a man fell down through the chimney. It was a head with shoulders, arms and hands. This piece of torso lay for a while on the floor without moving.

Soon after, the youth heard again a voice in the chimney, “Can I fall?” Again, the youth answered, “Why shouldn’t you fall?” Then the middle part of a man, from the chest to the haunches, fell down to the floor next to the first and remained there without moving.

Once again, the youth heard the voice asking, “Can I fall?” and once again, the youth answered, “Why shouldn’t you fall? You have to have something with which to stand up!” With that, a man’s feet fell down. They were unbelievably big, just as were the pieces that had fallen before.

After falling, all the pieces lay quietly on the floor. When the youth had tired of this, he approached the pieces and said, “Now that every part of you has come down, it would be best if you began to hop around here.” With that, the pieces pushed themselves together, becoming a frighteningly large man.

Without saying anything to the youth, the huge man then walked out of the kitchen and went into the anteroom. The youth followed the big man wherever he went. He first went into a front room of the house and approached a large chest. This, he opened and the youth could see that it was filled with coins. The man took one handful of coins after the other from the chest, threw them over his head while letting them fall behind him.

He continued doing this until late into the night until the chest was empty. He then reached into the pile that he had made on the floor and in the same way shoveled the coins over his head and back into the chest.

The youth stood next to the ghost while he threw the coins back and forth, watching as they rolled here and there over the floor. The ghost then busied itself with all force to gather the coins and again return them to the chest, scratching with both hands all of them together that had rolled around the floor.

The youth surmised that the ghost believed that daylight was coming and so the ghost must be hurrying. It then happened that the ghost had thrown all of the coins back into the chest, and the youth noticed that it wanted to hurry out of the room. The youth felt that there was no need for the ghost to hurry.

But the ghost said that there certainly was good cause as the day was now nigh. He wanted to pass by the youth, but the latter tried to prevent him passing by holding him fast. This he could only do for so long until the ghost became angry, grabbed the youth and told him that it was no longer advisable for the youth to prevent him from leaving.

Still, the youth held the ghost but soon noticed that his strength was too little and so drew back slowly and tried to duck heavy blows and attempts

to trip him. This went on for a while. Once as the ghost turned toward the door of the room that was standing open he tried to lift the youth to his chest so that he could throw him harder to the floor.

But the youth clearly saw what he intended and knew that could lead to his death. So he tried a trick. When the ghost made the first attempt to grasp him to his chest, the youth jumped with such force into the ghost's arms that it fell backward with its back directly onto the threshold as the youth came down right on top of him.

This caused the ghost's head to fall with its head outside of the room; the daylight, now standing high in the sky, struck the ghost in the eyes. This caused the ghost to split into two halves and sink into the ground right where he laid, half of him on each side of the threshold. The earth immediately closed over the two halves as soon as they had disappeared into the ground.

Although the youth's muscles were sore and stiff from battling with the ghost, he nonetheless immediately began to fashion two crosses from wood, each of which he stuck in the floor where the halves had sunk; one outside and the other inside of the doorway. He then went to bed and slept until the people returned to the house in clear daylight the next morning.

They wished him a good morning with happy faces when they saw that he was still alive and just as they had left him the evening before. They asked him if he hadn't noticed anything of the ghost during the night. He replied that he hadn't noticed any ghost. No one would believe him, regardless of what he did to convince them.

Still exhausted from his fight with the ghost, he stayed the next night. The people of the estate also wanted above all not to lose him because his bravery and courage was contagious and had spread amongst them.

That evening when he saw that they again were making ready to leave, he tried every way he knew to convince them to remain. He tried to assure them that the ghost would not harm them, but nothing helped. They simply refused to believe him, and so left just as on the evening before. But this time his arguments and encouragements brought matters to where they no longer feared leaving him behind.

When everyone had left, the young man went to bed and slept quietly and without worry until the clear light of the next day. Again, the people

returned to the estate and asked him about the ghost. He answered that he hadn’t seen anything of the sort and again told them that for this reason they had nothing more to fear.

He then told them what had happened the night before, showed them the wooden crosses on the floor where the body parts had sunk into the ground, and finally he led them to the chest of money. They thanked him with words of praise for his bravery and asked him to state any demands for either money or goods he might wish from them as compensation for his help, and said that he should remain at Skálholt for as long as he wished.

But he just thanked them for their friendly offer and said that he wanted neither riches nor anything else and said further that he did not wish to stay beyond this day. Still, he remained that night and everyone else stayed as well, sleeping in the house. Neither then nor later did anyone see any sign of the ghost.

The next morning he made himself ready to leave Skálholt. The people did not want to lose him, but their wishes brought little; he wanted to leave and said that he had nothing more to accomplish there and that they all could now stay in the house. With that, he left Skálholt much against the will of the people, heading northwards.

Nothing worthy of telling happened on his way until one fine day when he came to a cave. Going inside, he saw no one. But in a side chamber, he saw twelve beds arranged in two rows of six each. The beds were not made, and as the day was not yet at an end and he felt that whoever lived here would not be back soon, he began to make all of the beds.

When he was finished, he laid down on one of the beds at the outermost side of the cave, wrapped himself carefully in the blanket and fell asleep.

After a while he awoke from the sound of someone moving about in the cave. He heard that a group of people had come in and that they wondered who may have been there and had been friendly enough to make up the beds. They said that whoever it was had earned their thanks, they said.

It then appeared to him that after they had eaten their evening meal they went to bed. But when the owner of the bed in which he lay pulled back the blanket, he saw the young man. They then thanked him for his helping hand that had been so useful for them, and asked him to stay with them to help them with matters in the cave as they did not have the time as they had to

leave the cave at sunrise. Otherwise, their enemies would come and wage a battle with them; for this reason, they had no time to care for their quarters.

So the young man accepted their offer to remain for a time. He asked them why it was each day they had to endure such fighting that never ended. The cave dwellers said that those who were their enemies were men with whom they had already had many battles and these men had always been defeated by the cave dwellers. They told how every evening they had overpowered their enemies, killing them. But it was always so that these enemies returned the next morning, wilder and more vicious than before. It was without a doubt that the cave dwellers would be attacked in their cave if they did not return to the place of battle at sunrise. With that, the cave dwellers went to bed and slept until the next morning.

Right at sunrise, the cave dwellers, armed to the teeth, left the cave. But as they left they first asked the young man to care for their quarters as he had said he would do. This, he promised to do.

During the day, the youth went into a forest of walnut trees that was in the same direction as he had seen the cave dwellers go that morning. He wished to see where the battle was taking place. When he discovered the battlefield he hurried back into the cave. He than made all of the beds, prepared the whole cave and did whatever else needed to be done.

Tired and exhausted, the cave dwellers returned home that evening. They were happy to find that the youth had attended to everything so that they had nothing more to do except eat and then go to bed, which except for the youth, they did.

He lay awake, thinking about how he could find an explanation that the cave dwellers were missing. When he thought that all of his new companions were deep in sleep, he got up, chose a weapon that he liked best and left the cave. He then went to the battlefield, reaching it shortly before midnight. There was nothing more there to see except the dead enemies and their decapitated heads. Here, he stayed for a while.

When daylight came, he saw on the edge of the battlefield that a hill suddenly opened and a woman emerged. She wore a blue cloak and carried a pot in one hand. She went directly to the battlefield and to one of the dead. She then took something from the contents of the pot and brushed it on the neck of the torso of the dead man. She then did the same to the neck

of the man’s severed head, after which she placed the head on the torso. The head suddenly was again fixed to the body, and the man came again to life.

The woman did the same to two or three others, who also suddenly came to life. At this, the youth jumped at the old woman, giving her a deathblow. Now he was able to understand how it was that the enemies of the cave dwellers always returned to do battle. He then killed the others who the woman had brought back to life.

When he had completed this task, he tried himself to see if he was able to return the dead back to life in the same way as she had done. He painted some of the content of the pot on a dead man’s neck stump and found that it worked in the same manner as before. So for a while he entertained himself with bringing the dead fighters back to life, and then killing them again. This he did until sunrise when his companions from the cave appeared, fully armed.

They were quite alarmed that he had disappeared along with some of their weapons. But when they came to the battleground and found their enemies still lying dead, they saw that things had turned in their favor. The cave dwellers celebrated seeing the youth again and asked him how he had come upon the idea to come here.

The youth told them how everything had happened, and how the huldre woman had brought their enemies back to life. He then showed them the pot of salve. He then took one of the dead enemy fighters, brushed some of the salve on the neck and set the head back on the body. Immediately the body came to life, but the cave dwellers killed him again.

The cave dwellers now thanked him with many and kind words for his proven courage, and asked him to stay with them as long as he desired, offering him money for the help he had shown them.

He thanked them for the friendly offer, saying that he would gladly accept the offer to stay with them. After all this, the cave dwellers were so pleased and happy over the young man that they broke out in silliness and pranks. It was even suggested to try how it would be to die, since they could bring each other back to life again.

So they killed each other, then spread the salve on the wounds and came immediately back to life. This they did as a prank for quite some time. But once, as the youth’s head was severed and then with help of the salve it was

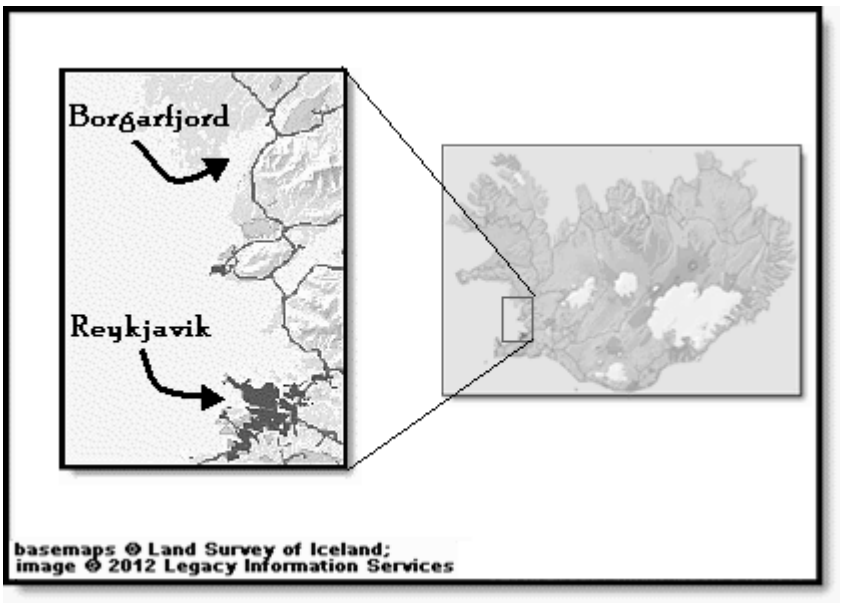
reattached, his face was turned to the rear and the back of his head was to the front. When the young man saw his backside because his head was turned around, he was horrified and asked them in God’s name to free him from this torture.

The cave dwellers ran to him immediately, lifted his head from his body again and then set it back correctly. He came again to his senses, and afterward was as brave as he had always been.

The cave dwellers and the youth then gathered all of the dead enemy, then took their weapons, and with the huldre woman who had brought the pot of salve from the hill, burned them all. They then went into the hill from where she had emerged, took everything of value and carried it all back to their cave.

From then on, the young man always remained with them, and from that time on, no more is told of him.

Chapter 28. The Saga of Jon Asmundson



A poor married couple once lived on Borgarfjord. The man's name was Asmund. They had many children, all small. It was not known what the children's names were, only that the oldest was named Jon.

Times were difficult in the land. The farmer Asmund had to leave the farm, and the children were given out to various other farms to be raised.

At the time, a priest named Kristian lived in Reykjavik. He took Jon Asmundsson(15) as foster son, where Jon grew up. Jon was a handsome boy and stronger than others his age. By nature, he spoke little, but was very ambitious. The priest loved him dearly, and everyone at the parsonage was happy to have Jon.

Then one summer, as often happens, a trading ship came to Reykjavik. On board was a foreign trader whose name is not known. He wished to trade with, among others, the priest Kristian. Once, when the priest was aboard the trader's ship, the talk came around to strong men. The trader, a large and strong man himself, went to a place on the boat where there were four sacks of oats tied together, lifted them up and the offered three gold marks to the man who could do the same. But no one was there who dared to accept this challenge of strength.

When the priest came home, he told his foster son Jon Asmundsson about the trader’s wager and said that Jon should try it. Jon said little other than that he would try it. The priest went back to the trader and told him that a man had come who would win his wager.

So the trader led Jon to where the sacks lay. Jon took them and threw them on his shoulder, carrying them back and forth across the deck, and then laid them back in the same place as before. The trader, red in the face, weighed out the gold marks and paid Jon.

As Jon and the priest prepared to leave the boat, the trader invited Jon to visit him before he sailed away, an offer that Jon gladly accepted. Jon and the priest then left for home. The priest was happy over their success but Jon acted as though it were nothing special.

Later on another day before the trader had sailed, the priest reminded Jon of his intended visit. So Jon paid a visit to the boat, and the priest accompanied him. The trader welcomed them cordially and invited Jon to come with him into the boat’s cabin.

The priest wanted to accompany them, but the trader said that they had no business with each other. The priest replied that there seemed to be no reason that would disturb their getting together, and so he followed them into the cabin.

There, the trader said to them that their business was not yet at an end, because the next summer he would bring a young man with him with whom Jon should wrestle. If Jon were then to win, he would receive ten gold marks. With that, they parted and the trader sailed away.

The time passed quietly, and that winter the priest asked Jon if he remembered what he had said to the trader before they parted. Jon said that he hadn’t thought that much about it. The priest said that it would be best for them to think of a way out of the matter because the young man with whom the trader meant for Jon to wrestle was not a real person. Rather, he was one of the fiercest Moors(16) to be found.

But the priest said that he would find Jon a way out of the matter, but that they must be prepared when the third week of summer came as then the trader would return. Jon gave no further thought to the matter.

When exactly three weeks of summer had passed, a ship sailed in from the sea into Reykjavik. The priest went to Jon, told him what happened and had him dress in a black lodenwool waistcoat and a belt. He then gave Jon a small, sharp dagger to hide in the arm of the waistcoat.

The priest said that Jon could not withstand the Moor's grasp, who certainly would throw Jon over his head in the first round. But he would try to ensure that Jon landed on his feet and that Jon should then make the Moor remove his loden waistcoat. While this happened, Jon should grasp the dagger and be ready if the came for him a second time.

The trader's boat had hardly dropped anchor when a skiff left the boat and a gigantic Moor cloaked in a loden cloak landed on the shore. Jon and the priest stood near the tidal scale. The Moor immediately ran at Jon, grabbed him and swung him into the air. But Jon fell back on his feet.

Jon then told the Moor to remove his cloak so that they could measure themselves wrestling. This, the Moor did and in the meantime Jon had taken the small dagger and held it ready. When the Moor came at him a second time, Jon ran toward him, thrusting the dagger into the Moor's body, wounding him.

The wrestling match between them lasted a while, and the Moor would have done Jon more harm if his waistcoat had not protected him. The match ended by Jon throwing the Moor to the ground.

Following their match, Jon and the priest rowed to the ship and greeted the trader. The priest said that Jon had earned the gold marks because the Moor lay on the wrestling field. The trader was most upset and said that they had used a dirty trick but that Jon did not show courage and bravery.

The priest replied that in this case it was equal against equal because the Moor was no normal man that the trader had sent against Jon. Finally, the trader gave in and paid the gold marks, but said that before the summer's end he wanted Jon to visit him again before departing.

Everything remained as before until the time came for the trader to leave. Then the priest reminded Jon that the trader had demanded a visit from him, and said the he also would go along to be present when they again met. So they traveled to the trader's boat and greeted him, who returned the greeting and then asked Jon to accompany him.

This Jon did, but with the priest close behind. The trader told the priest that what he and Jon had to discuss wasn't the priest's concern. But the priest replied that he did not intend to disturb their talk but that he wished to be near his man.

This time, the trader said that next summer he would bring a young dog with him against which Jon should measure his strength. If Jon were to triumph over the dog, he would earn fifteen gold marks. With that, they parted.

The summer passed and a good part of the winter without Jon speaking of the matter. So the priest once asked him if he had given any thought to the trader's words. Jon answered, "No". The priest said that the arrival of the trader next summer would not bring anything better than before; that he would sail in after two weeks of summer had passed but that the dog against which he thought to measure Jon's strength was a large, vicious bloodhound and that they must think of a trick. Jon asked the priest to think of something for him.

When two summer weeks had passed, a ship approached from the sea. The priest called Jon to him and showed him the same black woolen waistcoat that he had worn the previous summer. The priest had braided into it strips of heavy parchment before Jon could put it on.

The priest then handed Jon a metal weapon shaped like a halberd with a toothed tip, and there had stuck a piece of meat. He told Jon to hold the weapon and try to approach the dog so that it grabbed at the meat. He should then thrust the weapon into the dog's throat.

They then went down to the shore, where the ship had barely dropped anchor when the do was released onto land. It was a big dog, and appeared to be ferocious. Jon went to meet the dog, which ran at him viciously intent on tearing him to pieces.

But the waistcoat again protected him and stopped him from being hurt. Jon ducked the dog's attack as best he could while holding the piece of meat in front of him. Finally, it happened that the dog tore his mouth on the halberd while Jon thrust it with all his might into the dog's throat, not letting up at all while defending himself nicely. Thanks to the waistcoat, the dog was unable to harm Jon and finally succumbed to Jon's attack, lying dead on the ground.

Jon and the priest then rowed out to meet the trader and greeted him. He returned the greeting with a surly manner. The trader's face was black and swollen. He hid is anger as much as possible. The priest said that Jon had earned the money that the trader had promised him the previous summer. But the trader said that this was questionable because Jon had used more tricks than bravery.

The priest replied that the trader had shown he was shameful to have sent such a wild animal to attack Jon. The trader then paid the money, but insisted that Jon meet him again before he sailed away this summer.

The time came for the trader to sail away. The priest told Jon that he must remember the trader's words, but that he would accompany Jon. The traveled to the boat and met with the trader, who immediately asked Jon to go with him into the boat's cabin. The priest wanted to follow, but the trader said that he was not allowed and had no business there.

The priest replied that Jon was his boy and that he would not take one step more without him, the priest, at his side. So the trader relented and all three went into the cabin. When they were inside the trader took a book down from a shelf, opened it and took out a loose page. He waved the page back and forth before Jon's face as though he wanted to avoid that the priest saw it. Still, the priest was able to gain a quick look at it without the trader noticing.

The trader then placed the page back in its place and said that the next summer Jon must bring him the book in which the page belongs to him. If he did, he would gain 30 gold marks. But if he could not bring the book, Jon must allow himself to be labeled a coward. With that, they parted. Jon and the priest returned home and the trader immediately sailed away to sea.

When only one week of summer remained, Priest Kristian asked Jon what he thought about the task that the trader had set for him. Jon answered that he hadn't thought about it. The priest asked him if he knew what the page was that the trader had shown him. Jon answered, "No".

Then the priest said that it wasn't surprising that Jon didn't know because it was a page from the devil's handbook. And now, the trader had given him the dangerous task to discover that. But it would be no easy task. The priest then said that he had a brother who was a priest in the

underworld, and that only he could help Jon in this matter of finding the devil's handbook. There was no other way.

Jon's task was to prepare immediately to travel to the underworld to visit the priest's brother. Also, Jon must arrive on the first day of winter, and he must remain there for the whole season.

So Jon prepared himself for wandering. When everything was ready, the priest gave Jon a letter for his brother. He also gave Jon a yarn ball that would show him the way. The priest wished Jon a happy trip, and warned him to keep watch around him on his way. He also told Jon that during his winter's stay he could not speak a single word. But Jon said for him that would be no problem.

Jon then departed, throwing the yarn ball ahead while holding the end of the yarn in his hand. The ball rolled a long while ahead until he came to a mountain to the north of Reykjavik. Jon noticed a cavelike opening in the mountain. The yarn ball rolled into the opening and Jon followed.

The path inside was dark and uneven. Jon began to wonder if he should continue, but the yarn ball tugged harder and Jon found his courage and continued. He went for some way until it suddenly became light. Jon saw an attractive area over which the yarn ball rolled for a time until he came to a large town with elegant buildings. There, the yarn ball stopped in a doorway.

Jon picked up the yarn ball and then knocked on the door. A young maid stepped out. She was well dressed but without any elegance, courteous of manner and the prettiest maid that Jon had ever seen. Jon bowed before her and then handed her the letter, which she quietly took. She also took the yarn ball, and with both she went into the house.

After a short time, the same maid came out again, this time accompanied by a second maid who was younger. The younger maid looked at Jon and then disappeared back into the house. The first maid took Jon by the hand and led him down a pair of hallways to a room in which stood a small table, a bench, a stool and a bed. She then left but soon returned with food and table setting.

The essence of the story is, Jon stayed a long while there and believed that it must now be the middle of winter. He saw no one else but the same

young maid who came each day, set the table and made Jon's bed. They never spoke a word to each other and Jon heard no one's voice.

Then one day a handsome, tall and stately man came in. This was the priest of the underworld, Priest Kristian's brother. He was clothed in a long, black robe and greeted Jon with "good day". There was mildness in his voice. But Jon said nothing.

The priest asked Jon if he know how much time had passed, but Jon said nothing. The priest then said, "You have done well, Jon, being steadfast in not speaking. For this reason, you have done well in your task, and for your self-control, you will be rewarded. But today is the first day of summer, and so you may speak." This made Jon very happy.

The priest said that Jon should now begin his trip home, and that he should not delay any longer because the trader would be coming after the first week of summer. The priest then gave Jon a book, telling him to protect it and to bring it to his brother and that it would not be long before the book's owner missed it and took it back when it was in possession of the trader.

Also, his brother Priest Kristian should buy the whole ship's cargo and bring it to the shore before giving the book to the trader. The priest then asked Jon to greet his brother, wished him a long life and told him that his daughter would escort him back and show him the way to find his home.

The maid then came and brought Jon back to the path. She was the same maid who had cared for his food and bed during the winter. They went hand in hand, but nothing is told of what they talked about until they suddenly stopped and she said that she could go no further and that it would be easy for him to find the part of the way remaining. She also said that she must leave him, even though it gave her a heavy heart, and that they could not remain together and enjoy each other's company because he could not live in the underworld and she could not live on earth.

"But," she said, "I will not hide it from you that I am expecting a child, and I will send it to you when, if a boy, he is six and if a girl, when she is twelve. Much depends on whether you care well for the child." After saying this, she gave him the yarn ball but said that he would not need it to find his way but that he should follow her directions. She then bid him a sorrowful

farewell and wished him a good life, because it was difficult for them to part.

He then went the way that she had shown him. It was neither difficult nor dangerous but he knew not where and how he crossed between the two worlds. Near the end of the first summer week he came again to Reykjavik where Priest Kristian greeted him happily and found that he had completed his task well. Jon gave him the greetings from his brother, and the book.

Shortly thereafter, the trader sailed into the harbor. The priest immediately paid him a visit. The greetings between them were cool. The priest told the trader that it had been a poor year on land and that there was a shortage of food. For this reason, he wanted to buy the ship's cargo. Over this, they soon agreed, and within three days, the whole boat's cargo was brought to land. With this done, Jon and the priest rowed out to the boat where the trader immediately asked Jon how it had gone with his assignment.

Jon said that he was successful. With that, the priest, in Jon's place, handed the book to the trader, who was very unpleasantly surprised when he saw that it was the correct book. The priest then asked the trader to make the promised payment to Jon, which the trader reluctantly did. Then, Jon and the priest wished the trader well, and returned to their small boat.

No sooner had they reached land than the sea became very rough. They looked back to where the trader's boat had been, but it was gone. It was never seen again.

Now, there were great riches in the priest's house. The next half year went by and Jon remained with the priest. He had always seemed very withdrawn to the other people there, but never as much as since his return from the underworld. One day, the priest spoke with Jon about what was bothering him, saying that he had an idea why Jon was so quiet: that Jon was fond of his brother's daughter back in the underworld. But Jon said nothing.

Priest Kristian had three daughters; what their names were isn't told in this saga. The priest said that Jon could have whichever one of his daughters he wished if it would better his demeanor. Finally, Jon chose the youngest daughter for a wife, and they were married by the priest, who then

gave them one of the best farms in the neighborhood for a home. They then moved in and built a household.

They lived in harmony together and had sufficient wealth. Still, Jon was always quiet and sad. Years passed and the couple had many children. Then one day, there was a knock at the door of Jon's house when everyone was gathered in the bathing room. Jon sent one of his sons, a six year old, to the door. When he returned, he told of a wonderful little girl outside who had greeted him cordially and asked him to tell them inside that she wished to speak with his father.

These words lit up Jon's face like sunlight, and he got up immediately and went outside. The little girl kissed him and greeted him as "father", and he received this with heartiness and happiness. The girl told that she was sent by her mother, the daughter of the priest of the underworld, from whom she wished to convey her loving greetings.

Jon led the girl directly to his wife, telling her of the girl's origin and of his great duty he felt to the girl, asking his wife to regard the girl as her mother just as she did for her other children.

Jon's wife welcomed the girl lovingly, whose name was Sigrid and was twelve years old when this all happened. She stood out for her great beauty and many other virtues. When she was with her father for three years, during which she showed exceptional abilities and love, she asked for permission the visit her mother. Jon granted this wish gladly, saying that she should remain with her mother for a year if she wished.

A year later, Sigrid returned to her father. He greeted her as lovingly as before. She also brought him her mother's last greeting., As she then told, her mother had died before Sigrid had left the underworld. She also brought a message that Jon would only live for another month. This news seemed to please Jon more than it saddened him, who showed no other change.

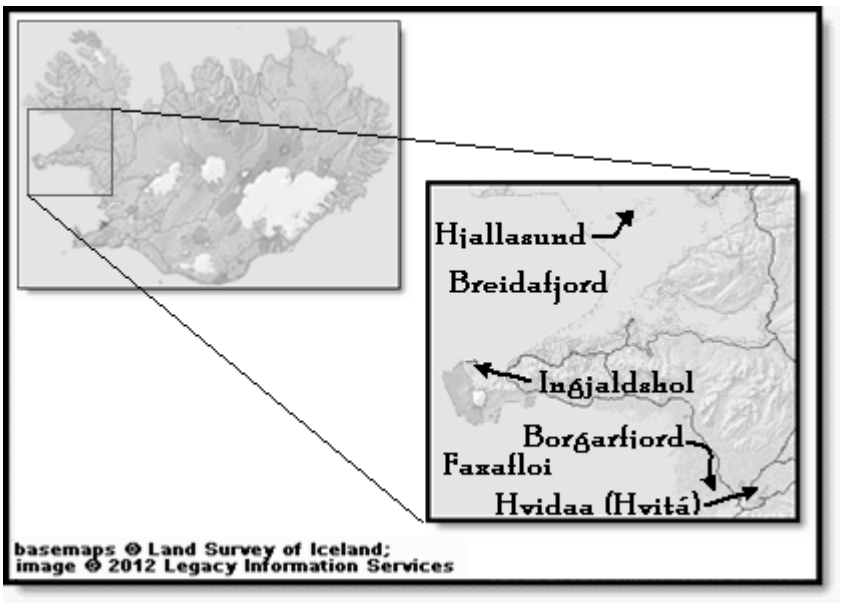
Jon made specific arrangements for his property, and in his last will and testament he named his daughter Sigrid as heir to the farm where he lived. Everyone saw that he loved her above all of the other children, and she was a flower among women. Jon gave his wife and their children all of his personal belongings, and it made up great wealth. Jon then died, and many cried over the loss.

A few years later, Sigrid married a worthy man and they settled at the farm, the best in the area. Sigrid was always regarded as an exceptional woman, and the married couple lived long and with great love together. They had many children, and their lineage is great in the south of the land.

15. Translator's note: Children were and still are named patrynomically, where sons surnames are formed by taking the first name of the father and adding "...son". In this case, the name is Jon Asmundsson. Daughters are named similarly, but append "...dottir" to the father's first name. In rare cases, the mother's first name may be used.

16. Translator's note: A Moor, or "mohr", was a person from Spain or North Africa. See the endnote in Chapter 50 for more on Moors and "Turks" in Iceland.

Chapter 29. The Brothers



In the valleys lived two brothers, Thord and Andreas, who were sons of the elder Andreas. People thought they both were quick tempered. In the winter of 1820, the two traveled to Hjallasund for fishing. They both were in their manhood but still unmarried. Both were in love with the same maid, and this disturbed the brotherly relationship between them.

Early in the winter, the boat on which Andreas was sailing was shipwrecked, and Andreas went down with the boat. This gave his brother free hand for courting the maid, which made him very happy, and he visited her more openly than he had done before.

Time went by uneventfully until one evening when Thord was traveling alone in the dark on the road from Ingjaldshol. As he came to his cabin at Storedumpa on the way to Hjallasand and was about to go to the door, he saw a man coming from a boat who appeared to be trying to get ahead of him.

Thord hurried to the door, and the other man was right at his heels. Thord looked at the man and recognized him as his brother Andreas. Upset, Thord stormed into the hut, but forgot to close the door behind him. In the hut, the beds were arranged so that at one end was farmer Thomas' bed,

while at the other end were beds for three fishermen. Thord's bed was in the middle of the wall opposite the ladder leading downstairs.

When Thord came into the hut it was dark, and everyone was asleep. The farmer Thomas awoke from the sound of Thord's steps. Thord sat down on his bed, and he then heard Thomas say to him, "Do you think I'm afraid to look you in the eyes?" At that same moment there was a frightful noise, and Thord flew like a bullet against the fishermen's beds, then over them and straight up the wall.

The fishermen awoke as though from a bad dream. In an instant the ghost pulled Thord to him, dragging him along the floor and down the ladder. The farmer Thomas lit a lamp and told the fishermen to help Thord, who was having a bad time of it. The fishermen ran down the ladder with Thomas.

The ghost had flown away, but Thord lay as though dead below in the hallway covered in his own blood. They picked him up and carried him to his bed, where they kept watch over him the whole night and nursed him with great care. His body was in a bad way, blue and swollen, and even by dawn the next morning he had not awakened. Thord lay ill for some time, but finally recovered. Still, every night that winter a light must be kept burning by him so that the ghost did not return.

The next winter, a pair of fishermen came to work with Thomas in Dumpa. One of them was named Sigurd Sigurdsson and was from Bredevig in Barderstran. He was 21, and for such a young man was large and had good strength. He was given that stood at one end, and the other fisherman was given another.

Somewhat later, Thord Andreasson came. Thomas asked Sigurd to take him on as bedmate. Sigurd knew nothing of what had happened the previous winter and gladly accepted the farmer's request. When they went to bed, Sigurd lay on the outside and Thord against the wall.

When they had gone to sleep, Sigurd dreamt that a man with a horrible appearance came to him and said, "I will reward you if you lay close to my brother so that I am unable to get near him."

"What do you want from him?" asked Sigurd.

"I want to murder him," said the man.

“I see,” said Sigurd sarcastically, “but you want nothing more from him?”

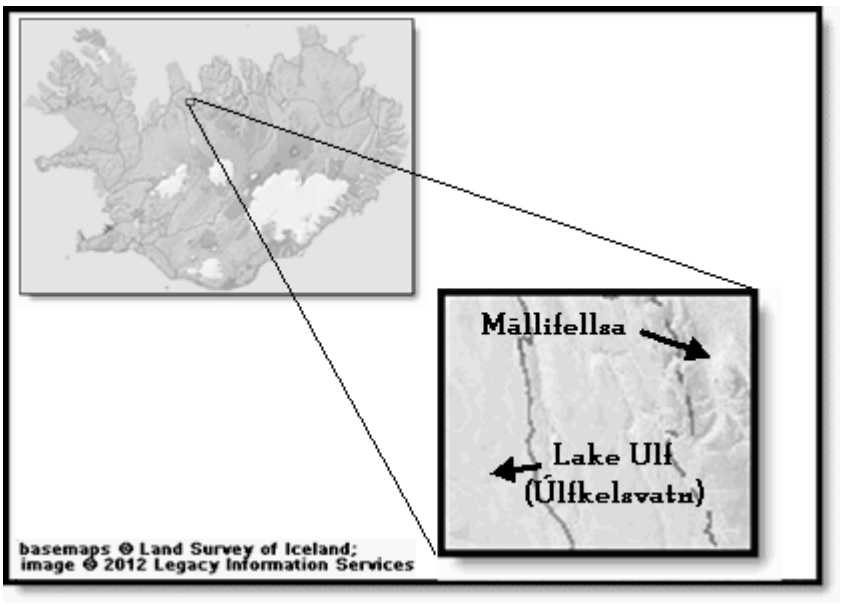
It then seemed to Sigurd as though he was attacked by the man. They then grappled with each other and the result was, the attacker fell. Sigurd then awoke, and crawled on all fours on the floor in front of the bed. The next night, Sigurd dreamt the same dream. But now it seemed harder than the night before to overpower the ghost. The result was, Sigurd awoke because his bedmates were holding him over the hatch door. They thought that he was sleepwalking and wanted to stop him.

On the third night, Sigurd dreamt that he was on a boat down on the beach and that the same man came and attacked him bitterly, and that they grappled with each other for a long time. Finally, Sigurd was victorious, dreaming that he vanquished the ghost by taking a sword in his hand and hacking his opponent to pieces, stopping the ghost from his attack.

Sigurd remained the whole winter in Dumpa, and slept next to Thord. After this time, he never again dreamt of fighting with anyone who tried as a ghost to injure his brother Thord.

Many years later Thord and Sigurd met and talked of the ghost. It never again attacked Thord since Sigurd had defeated it. Thord survived his brother Andreas by about 20 years, but he never quite regained his old strength after the meeting that night in the fishing hut. Later, he fell through the ice at Hvidaa on Borgarfjord and drowned. He was then on a trip to the Southland where he went to fish while leading three packhorses, which all drowned with him.

Chapter 30. Lake Ulf



In the south between the Skagefjord Valleys, is a lake very rich in fish named Lake Ulf. This is the story of how it gained its name.

At Mällifellsaa, there once lived a rich farmer. He had a son named Gudmund, a very promising boy in every way. He was strong and a proficient wrestler. He was often outside looking for livestock, and the leader or “king of the mountain”, as the people of Rangvellinga called him.

One day, Gudmund went with a number of men to search for lost sheep. During the search, Gudmund was eventually paired with a young boy and they both arrived at Lake Ulfs. There, they found two lambs that they began following. The lake was frozen over and they saw a man out on the ice, lying down and fishing.

When Gudmund and his companion came closer to the lake, the fisherman sprang up, grabbed a spear ax, ran toward them and slid directly toward Gudmund. Hardly had this begun when the boy turned and ran, but Gudmund waited for the oncoming man.

When the man was close to Gudmund, he threw the spear ax toward him. Gudmund ducked, and the spear ax fell from the aggressor’s hand(17). Gudmund caught it, began running and glided out onto the lake while the

aggressor began to follow him. They continued for a while until Gudmund saw an opportunity. Turning around, he gave the attacker a deathblow. As the attacker incurred the blow, he called in a loud voice for Brand, Thorgils and Olaf.

Gudmund then returned to his companions and told them what had happened. With closed ranks, they returned to the lake. But the dead man was gone. They could see tracks where he had been taken away, and a trail of blood led toward land.

Following this event, Gudmund stayed at home and never went out again to search for sheep. He feared that the attacker was lying in wait for him. Then, in late summer, the shepherd from Mällifellsaa became sick and there was no one on the farm to collect the sheep except Gudmund.

So he went out but was unable to find them anywhere. He went on and on until he reached the heath, but found no sheep there either. Then fog fell, so heavy that Gudmund had no idea where he was. Still, he continued on until he saw a large herd of sheep and with them, a man.

The man, an outlaw, attacked Gudmund. They struggled so long with each other until Gudmund threw his opponent to the ground. The outlaw begged Gudmund for mercy and promised to reward him if it were granted. Gudmund asked who the outlaw was and where he lived, and the outlaw said that his name was Olaf, that he was a brother of the man Gudmund had killed on the lake whose name was Ulf.

“We are six brothers, and I am the youngest and smallest of all. My father lives on a farm near here. He brought you here with magic to punish you for killing his son; he has even dug a grave in the foreyard of the farm, and you are the invited guest.

“We have a sister named Sigrid who our father loves most of all. She can be your biggest help if she will shake hands with you. My brother Brand is close by, and if you can bring him to ground so that you grant us both our lives, then she would probably grant you help, as good as she can.”

Gudmund let Olaf get up, and then he went on his way until he met Brand. They struggled with each other and Gudmund was able to defeat him. He asked Gudmund for mercy and promised him help in exactly the same way as Olaf had done earlier.

Gudmund let Brand get up. He then went to their farm and found Sigrid outside. He brought greetings from the two brothers, adding that they asked her to help whoever granted them their lives.

Sigrid led him to the loft above the stall, gave him a drink of wine to strengthen him. She then described to him the grave in the foreyard and advised him that when he wrestled with her father, to let him be driven toward the grave until they reached the edge. He should then jump over the grave and let the father fall in. But Gudmund should not kill him.

She said that her father was asleep and would soon awaken. Gudmund should go to the farmhouse and knock on the door. Gudmund did as she said. When the old man heard the knock, he got out of bed and said, “Gudmund has now finally come, and now he will show how good he is.”

The farmer went outside, but there was no mutual greeting. Instead, they immediately went after each other, and it was a hard fight. Gudmund soon saw that he had no more than half of the strength of the old man, so he only defended himself but did not attack. The old man tried to force him toward the grave, and Gudmund let him drive him.

But when they reached the grave, Gudmund jumped over the grave and yanked the old man head first into the grave. Sigrid and her two brothers with whom Gudmund had wrestled came right away and begged Gudmund to spare the father’s life. Gudmund promised to spare him only if he promised from now on to do Gudmund no harm. This, the old man swore to do.

Gudmund pulled the father from the grave, who thanked him for sparing his life and invited Gudmund in. At the same time, the father said that he didn’t know how his other sons would receive the outcome when they returned home.

Gudmund was treated as a guest, but that evening he was shut in a room alone. The older brother then returned home and asked if Gudmund was in the grave. The father told him how things had played out. This upset the son, who wanted to break down the door to Gudmund’s room.

But the old man stood in front of the door and said that the son would have to kill him first if he wished to violate the rights of a guest and kill Gudmund. With that, the son calmed himself and instead went to bed.

The next morning, the old man introduced Gudmund and told his family not to do him any harm. Gudmund remained with them the whole winter, and took a liking to Sigrid who was stately and so strong that she could hold her own with her brothers. She and Gudmund became close friends.

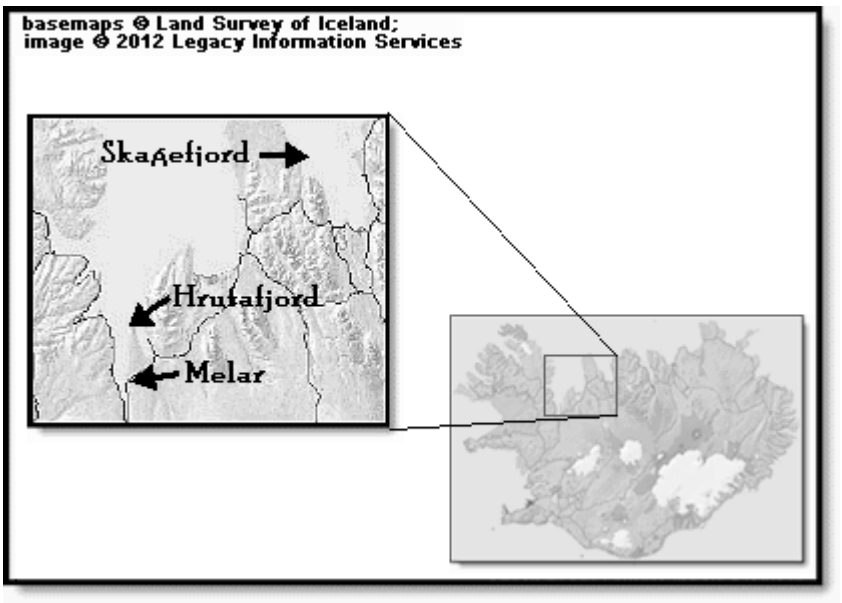
But in the spring, Gudmund yearned for home. Sigrid now was with child and wanted to accompany him. The father did nothing to stand in her way, and Gudmund left with Sigrid. They didn’t pause until they reached Mällifellsaa where everyone was happy to see him again; they believed that he was long dead and never to be found.

Gudmund married Sigrid and they lived long at Mällifellsaa. She was considered by all to be an exceptional and good-spirited womand.

As for the brothers, following the death of the father they found life in the wilderness deserted and boring. So they moved with all their goods to a populated area. Two of them became farmers in Skagefjord, and they all enjoyed reputations as worthwhile and brave men.

17. Translator’s note: In Iceland’s Middle Ages outlaws were banned by commonwealth law. They could not be aided or sheltered and could even be killed without the usual penalties for murder. Outlaws and their families often banded together to survive and resorted to violence either as a defense or to survive.

Chapter 31. Asmund the South Traveler



There was a man named Asmund. His forbearers came from Skagefjord. He was a clever man and capable of every task. At the time of this tale, he was about 20 years old.

Every year, Asmund traveled south as he usually did, and his family followed. This time, they spent the night at Melar in Hrutafjord, from where they planned to ride the next day to the heath. But the next morning, Asmund became very ill and so his companions waited the whole day for him. Asmund told them to travel on ahead and that he would soon follow. So they left, and Asmund remained behind.

The next day, Asmund felt quite well and so left to complete the journey. The weather was fair, but as he arrived in the south and was in the middle of the heath a very strong snowstorm arose. Asmund could not see where he was riding and soon lost his way.

He found no shelter and so took the packs from his horses, dug them into a snowdrift and used them as an entryway into a snow den. He then tied the horses together and went into the snow den on the lee side where he had made a hole to watch the weather. He then took out his travel rations and began to eat.

But no sooner had he begun eating than a turf-brown dog came into the hole in his snow den and dug through it. The dog appeared aggressive and angry and with each bite Asmund took of his food, became more vicious looking. The dog began to displease Asmund, who took a leg bone from a very large sheep out and gave it to the dog.

The dog took the bone and immediately ran out with it. After a short while, a tall, elderly man came to the door of the snow den. He spoke to Asmund, thanking him in the name of his dog. “Aren’t you the south-traveler Asmund?” asked the stranger.

“That’s my name,” answered Asmund.

“I’ll give you the choice between two things,” the man said. “Either you follow me, or the bad weather will continue until you are dead. You should know that I caused the bad weather, and it is my fault that you were ill. I did all this because I wished to speak with you because I know no more capable and braver man than you.”

This got Asmund’s attention, and he understood that there was only one thing to do whether he liked it or not. He told the stranger that he would rather go with him than lose his life in this snowdrift. “Then come with me,” said the man. Asmund immediately left with him. The storm stopped and the weather became pleasant.

The man went ahead while Asmund followed with the horses. Asmund was confused and had no idea in which direction they were going. When they had traveled a while, they came to a valley where a stream ran in the middle. Asmund was astounded by the red earth on one side of the stream while on the other side every bit of ground was white with snow.

On each side of the stream, Asmund saw a farm. They went to house on the snowy side of the stream. The old stranger took the horses, led them to a stall and fed them. Then he led Asmund into the house and to the bath hall. Here, he saw an elderly woman and a young, seemingly pretty maid; no one else was there.

After Asmund greeted them, the old man directed him to a place to sit. After a short time, the old man and the maid left, leaving Asmund alone with the elderly woman. She sat the whole time there, murmuring to herself, “It is a shame not to have any tobacco”. So Asmund took a piece of tobacco

from a pouch, tossing it to the elderly woman. She caught it and was very pleased by the gift.

The old man and the maid then came back. She brought Asmund something to eat while the old man stood the whole time next to him, appearing very pleased. When Asmund had eaten, the maid again went out followed by the old man. Asmund now thought that they must be asking each other for advice about how to murder him.

Soon the old man returned and told Asmund to take a place to rest. Asmund wanted very much to rest, so the old man led him to a room where a bed was made ready. The old man wished Asmund a good night and then left; the maid took Asmund's wet clothing. As she was about to take his stockings and shoes, he asked her not to do so thinking that there might be a trick behind it. But the maid said that there was no danger in it, and that no one would do him harm. With that, she gave Asmund a good night kiss and left.

The treatment that he enjoyed in an outlaw's home seemed strange to Asmund, and he wasn't totally displeased by the pleasure he found in the maid's kiss. But he soon fell asleep and only awoke again when he found the old man standing next to him.

It was bright daylight. The old man wished him good morning and said that he would now like to ask him about the matter about which he had brought him. "The facts of the matter are," said the old man, "that twenty years ago I lived below the valley in a settlement. I then had a child with my sister, and so must flee and move here. The old woman you saw yesterday is my sister and the child we had together is the young maid who helped you undress for bed.

"When I came here there were already outlaws who lived in the house you saw on the other side of the stream. They were the same men who still live at that farm. They have always been hostile to me, but I have always been able to defend myself, until now. But now I can no longer do it, and must submit to their power because they force all of the snowfall in the valley on my side of the stream.

"I have always made a habit of letting my sheep graze on their land on the other side of the stream, but I am no longer man enough to do it. So I'm asking you today to take my sheep over the stream and to protect them. I

know that you are a courageous man, and you will need to be because my two enemies will come, thinking that I am with the herd. You should have my turf-brown dog with you, and he will be of great help to you."

Asmund arose and went out with the sheep. The old man gave him his coat to drape over his shoulders and a halberd with which to defend himself.

As soon as Asmund had crossed the stream, the outlaws ran toward him and said, "Now it is death!" They believed that Asmund was the old man with the sheep. But as they came near, they said, "It's someone else as we had thought," and then jumped at Asmund and attacked him. Asmund set the dog on one of the outlaws and attacked the other himself.

The dog ravaged the first outlaw and then ran at the other, the dog and Asmund defeating him together. Asmund then stayed with the sheep until evening, and then returned to the old man's farm where they again met. He received Asmund gratefully and with heartfelt thanks for his day's work. The old man told him that he had watched as Asmund was killing the outlaws.

The next day, Asmund and the old man crossed the stream to the other farm, a good and roomy place to live. No one met them, just the livestock. They inspected the whole house and found a door that they could not open. So Asmund lunged at it, breaking it down. It led to an anteroom where they found a charming and pretty maid. She was tied to a beam by her hair.

Asmund freed her and asked why she was there. She replied that she was a farmer's daughter from Oefjord and that the outlaws had robbed them. She told them that they wanted to force her to marry one of them. But she was not willing, so they bound her there thinking that would force her to submit to one of them.

Asmund explained to her what had happened, and that she was now in the hands of good people. She was overjoyed, now that the danger was over.

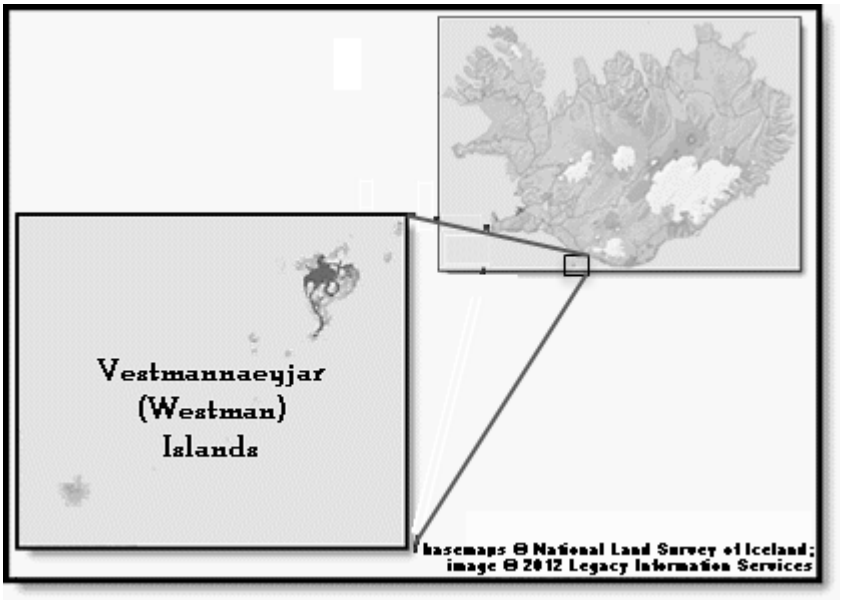
They then brought everything from the old man's hut over to the outlaw's farm, remaining there for the rest of the winter. Asmund liked the old man and the maid, but especially the old man's daughter, who learned a number of crafts from the maid from Oefjord.

In the spring, the old man told Asmund that he should return to his own home, but that he should return in the fall because he would then die. Then, the old man would ask him to care for his daughter and for his sister if she still lived, as well as the maid from Oefjord. Everything that was of value there would be his bridal dowry. Asmund then began his journey back to Skagefjord. The people there looked at him as though he had returned from the dead. But he told no one where he had spent the winter.

In the fall, he again left and returned to the maid in the valley. She was very happy to see him because both of the old people had died. She buried them under a mound on the high slope. Asmund remained for the winter with her. But in the spring, he moved with her, taking all the property with them, back to Skagefjord where he settled, marrying the old man’s daughter. The maid from Oefjord married a local man.

And here ends the story of Asmund the south-traveler.

Chapter 32. The Magicians of the Westman Islands



When the Black Death raced through Iceland(18) eighteen magicians met together to form an alliance. They moved to the Westman Islands with the plan to protect themselves from the plague as best they could. When through their knowledge of magic they saw that the sickness on Iceland's mainland had become less, they wanted to know if anyone was still alive there.

So they decided to send one of the group. They chose one who was neither least nor most experienced in their art. On the first day of advent they brought him to the mainland and said that if he were not back by Christmas time, they would dispatch a sending(19) to kill him.

The man left them, searching for a long time and traveling widely. But nowhere could he find a living person. The farms were empty and open, and inside bodies lay everywhere. Finally, he came to a farm that was closed and locked. This surprised him, and awoke the hope in him that here he would find people alive.

He knocked, and immediately a pretty young girl came and opened the door. He greeted her, but she threw her arms around his neck and cried for

joy, thrilled to see another person. She said that she had believed she was the only remaining being. She asked him to remain with her, and this he agreed to do.

They went inside and found much to discuss with each other. She asked where he came from and where he was going. He told her all this, and also that he must be back by Christmas. She begged him to remain by her as long as he could. He felt sorry for her and so promised her to stay. She told him that everyone had died and that she had traveled away from home in every direction for a week without meeting a living soul.

Christmas time approached, and the man from the islands thought about returning home. But the maid begged him to stay and said that his companions certainly could not be so hard-hearted as to make him suffer for staying with someone so hopeless and alone. He let her convince him, and then it was Christmas.

Now he wished to leave in spite of everything she said. She saw that her pleas bore no fruit and said, “Do you believe that you can reach the islands by tonight? Doesn’t it seem the same to die here by me as on some unknown place on your way?”

The man agreed that time was too short, so he decided to remain quietly where he was and to await death there. Night came, and he was very depressed. But the maid was in high spirits and asked him if he could see what the people on the islands were doing. He said that the sending had been brought to the mainland, and that it would come today.

The maid sat next to him on her bed, but he lay down in the bed behind hers. He said that he was beginning to feel sleepy, and that heralded the approach of the sending. With that, he fell asleep. The maid sat on the bed’s edge and woke him repeatedly so that he might say where the island people’s sending was now. But the closer it came, the more soundly he slept. When at last he said that it was not at the house, he slept so soundly that she was no longer able to wake him.

It was not long before she saw a dark brown fog force its way into the house. It swept slowly toward her, thickening into the form of a person. The maid asked where it wanted to go. The form disclosed its purpose, and then asked her to leave the bed “…because I cannot go past you,” it said.

The maid said to the spirit that it must do her a favor in return. The ghost asked what that could be. The maid replied that the spirit should show her how large it could grow. The spirit agreed, immediately becoming so large that it filled the whole house.

The maid then said, “Now I would very much like to see how small you can be.” The spirit replied that it could become as small as a gnat, changing suddenly into a tiny fly while trying to fly under the maid’s hand into the bed and to the sleeping man. Instead it unluckily flew into the hollow leg bone of a sheep that the maid held in her hand.

The maid then quickly jammed a stopper into the bone’s hollow center. She then stuck the bone with the fly inside in her pocket and waked the sleeping man. He quickly awoke and marveled that he was still alive. The maid then asked him where the sending was now. He answered that he had no idea where it was. The maid then said to him that she had long suspected that his colleagues on the islands were not great magicians. Hearing this pleased the man greatly, and they spent the holidays happily together.

But when the New Years approached, the man became very quiet. The maid asked him what the matter was. He said that the men on the islands were now preparing a new sending with the greatest magical strength. “He will come on New Year’s Day, and it will then be difficult to rescue me.” The maid said that he should not be afraid until she had tried, and “…you have nothing to fear from the sendings of the island dwellers”.

On the last day of the year he said that the sending was on the mainland, and “…he is coming quickly because he has strong magic powers.” The maid said that he should follow her out of the house, which he did. The soon came to a forest of underbrush. They stood there while she tore a pair of bushes out of the ground. She then uncovered a flat stone. The maid lifted up the stone and underneath appeared a hole in the earth.

They climbed down into the hole where it was dark and sinister but for dim light from a small wick burning in a skull of human fat. On a shelf near the lamp lay a ghastly relic of a man who was fearful to look at with eyes like blood and an appearance so repulsive that the man soon could look no more.

This old creature then said, “There must certainly be something new that has happened that brings you here, foster daughter. It has been a long time

since I last saw you. What can I do for you?" The maid then told the old creature why they had come, about the man with her and about the first sending.

The old man asked permission to see the leg bone, which she showed him. But as he took the leg bone from her, he became someone else entirely. He turned it in every direction and touched it everywhere on the outside. The maid then said, "Help us quickly, foster father, because he is now becoming sleepy and that is a sign that the sending will soon be here."

The old man then took the stopper out of the bone. Immediately the fly flew out. The old man stroked the fly and said, "Now go out and receive all sendings from the islands and swallow them whole." Then there was a loud clap of thunder, and the fly flew out and became so large that its upper jaw reached into the heaven while the lower jaw lay on the ground. It caught all of the sendings from the islands, and the man was rescued.

The young maid and the man from the islands left the hole in the earth, returned to the house and founded a successful farm. Later, they became man and wife, had many children and their progeny repopulated the mainland.

More of this story, I know not.

18. Translator's note: The "Black Death" spread through Europe in 1347 – 1351, but this is likely referring to the Icelandic outbreak in the 1600's (Peschke, Zachary (2008) "The Impact of the Black Death," ESSAI: Vol. 5, Article 32 – http://dc.cod.edu/essai/vol5/iss1/32).

19. Translator's note: A "sending" is a ghost or spirit sent by a magician or sorcerer to kill someone.

Chapter 33. The Sending

(Translator's note: see note 19 in the previous tale for a description of a sending.)

A woman sat at her work in the bath hall. Besides her, there was no one at the farm; the farmer was away from home seeking provisions, and the staff was busy outside.

Then, a young boy walked into the bath hall. He was small and very portly. He asked the woman where the farmer was. She was not quick to answer, as she did not like the boy. So he asked once more for the farmer with whom, he said, he had something serious to discuss and could not wait.

The woman asked him what his purpose was and if she could help with the matter. When the boy replied, "No", the woman said, "I don't believe that a sprout like you has any business with my husband. Or can you become bigger than you are now?"

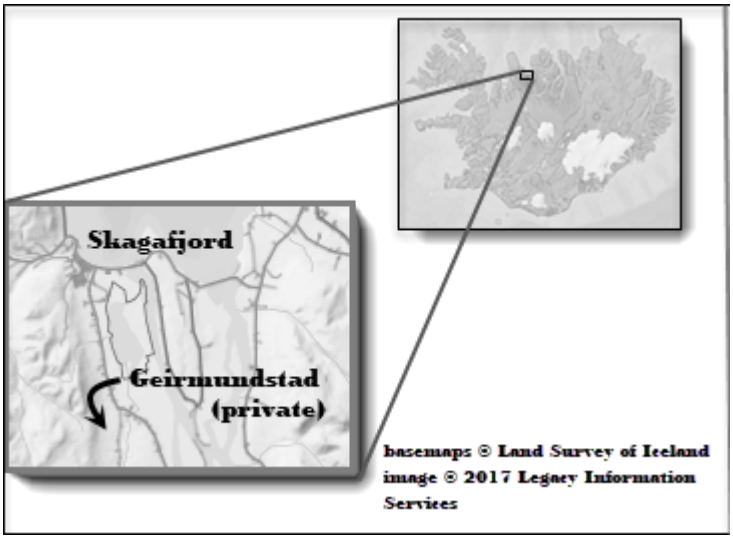
The boy replied that he could. She asked him to show her; otherwise, she didn't believe him. Then, the boy suddenly grew as large as a troll until he reached the ceiling. The woman then said that he wouldn't be held if he sat down, and so she asked him to become as he was before. This, he did.

The woman then asked him if he could make himself as small compared to his size now as he made himself large; she asked him to show her. He said yes, and slowly he became small until he reached the size of a sparrow. The woman then took out a small bottle and asked him if he could make himself small enough to fit inside. Immediately, the boy changed himself to the size of a fly and then crawled into the bottle. The woman was no fool, and stretched a piece of calfskin over the bottle, leaving the lad to satisfy himself with cowering inside.

When the farmer came home, the woman gave him the bottle and told him what had happened. He was happy about his wife's trick, took the bottle and went outside.

What happened with it later, no one knows.

Chapter 34. The Marriage Devil



At Geirmundstad (Geirmundarstaðir, private) on Skagafjord lived a married couple who did not get along. It was said that the woman was good to another man, and that this man did what he could to upset the relationship between her and her husband. To do this, the man conjured a devil that took on a dog's form. The dog was turf brown, and the man sent it to Geirmundstad to be a marriage devil.

An old woman lived with the married couple at Geirmundstad. She saw that every time before the couple began to argue, a turf brown dog entered the bath hall, went through the room, put its muzzle on the bed between the man and woman and then began an unearthly howl.

Whenever the dog finished howling, it was a standing rule that the man and woman would begin to argue. The old woman spoke with the others in the household about the precursors of the conflict between the couple that she noticed, and they all agreed that she should tell the wife her view and see if she could bring peace between them, as they were generally loved by all of them.

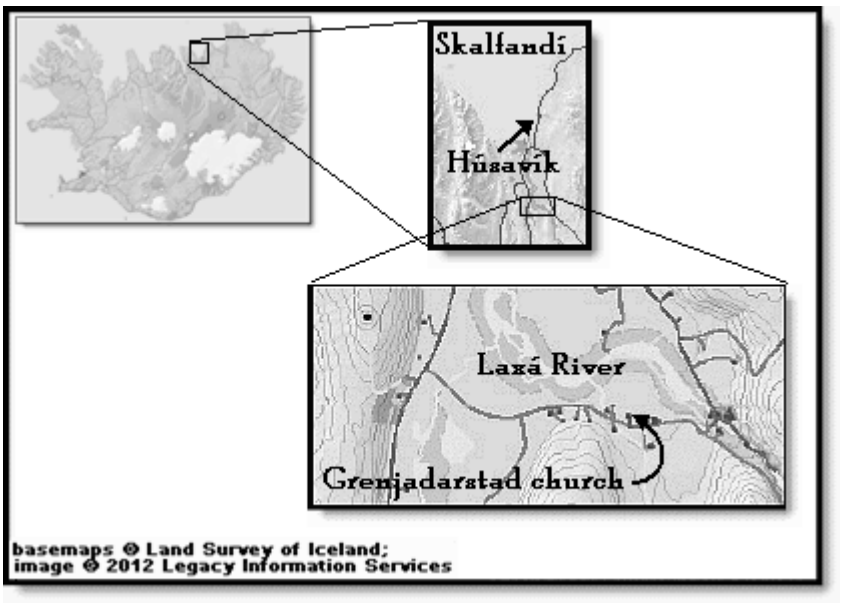
The old woman, who was very spiritual, spoke one day with the wife. She said that it was unchristian for a man and woman to live in such conflict together. At first, the wife did not want to hear what she said. But

the old woman said that she would certainly take the trouble to avoid anger with her husband if she knew where the anger came from.

The old woman then told the wife everything and implored her to begin giving in to her husband about everything and thereby stop satisfying the devil with their hateful arguing. The wife promised the old woman that she would do everything that was in her power.

It then happened that the couple’s relationship improved with every day because the woman gave in to her husband in everything so that finally, their lives together became loving. And the turf-brown dog was never seen again in the house.

Chapter 35. The Red Bull



At the time that Sira Thomas Skuleson(20) was priest at Grenjadarstad, he had two farmboys working for him named Bjarne and Martin. The two shared a common sleeping room that stood alone in the front of the farm.

Bjarne was previously married but now lived separated from his wife, had become enamored with a maid from the neighborhood, and now wanted above all to free himself from his wife. He tried to get a clever man from the north to teach him how one could raise a returner, or ghost of the dead, to set upon his wife and kill her.

Bjarne then began waking the returner, licking the spittle from the dead man’s face as the rules for raising the dead require. No sooner had he finished than the ghost attacked him. The result of their struggle was that the returner overpowered Bjarne so that he barely escaped with his life.

The returner was of less use to Bjarne than he had expected. It attacked him when he was awake and asleep so that Bjarne almost lost his senses and sanity. Neither Bjarne nor Martin was able to get much sleep; the ghost constantly knocked on the door ceaselessly, keeping them awake until Bjarne went outside. Then the ghost stayed away with him for a shorter or longer time. No one knew what happened between them until Bjarne returned and told Martin.

When this had gone on for a time and Bjarne had almost lost his mind, he went in his unhappy state to a clever man for advice on how he could free himself from the stalking of the returner. The man gave him a note with written signs on it and told him to go into the church at Grenjadarstad. He should then put on a number of priest's vestments and with these on, he was to stand behind the rail next to the altar and stay there regardless of what he might see or who might seem to be speaking to him. He would be lured to leave that place, and if he did it would be his end.

Finally, a monstrously big red bull would come that would extend its tongue between him and the altar. It would cost him his life if he were not clever enough to place the note of written signs on the bull's tongue. But if was able to do so, he would no longer have a reason to fear the return of the returner ghost.

After receiving this counsel, Bjarne went that night to the church and did as he had been told. As he waited, a crowd of people entered, of which he knew only a few. They talked to him in various ways, telling him for good and bad that he should leave the altar and come with them. One of them who Bjarne thought he knew was Sira Hallgrim Scheving, Dr. Scheving's grandfather, and he pulled at Bjarne to get him out from behind the rail.

One crowd after the other came, each only when they found that they would not be able to force Bjarne from behind the altar. Finally, the red bull came toward Bjarne and stretched out its tongue over the rail, trying to come between Bjarne and the altar and intending to toss him out from behind the rail. But Bjarne was able to place the note of signs on the bull's tongue. The bull disappeared, and from that moment on there was nothing keeping him in the church, and also nothing more to fear from the returner.

20. Translator's note: Sira = heathen priest in the Old West Norse (Icelandic norrøna) language.

Chapter 36. The Cask

One Sunday morning when the weather was clear and warm, a group of men went on a hike. That afternoon they pitched their tent on a beautiful green meadow.

The wanderers lay down to sleep, lying in a row in the tent. But the man lying nearest the tent door could not sleep, and his gaze wandered back and forth inside the tent. He noticed a cloud of bluish mist rise from the man lying furthest back in the tent. The mist moved forward through the tent and then outside.

Wondering what it could be, the man followed the mist cloud. He watched as it drifted over the meadow, finally stopping at a place where there lay a weathered horse's skull filled with loudly buzzing bluebottle flies. The mist drifted into the horse's skull, where it stayed for some time before re-emerging. It then again drifted over the meadow until it came to a very small stream flowing through the meadow.

It then drifted along the stream, appearing to the man as though it was looking for a place to cross. The man was carrying a whip in his hand and so he laid it across the stream. His whip was just wide enough to bridge the stream. The mist then moved over the whip, drifting over it as over a bridge across the stream. The mist drifted for a while onward until it finally reached a hummock in the meadow, into which it disappeared.

The man stood next to the hummock and waited for the mist to re-emerge from the hummock. Soon the mist again returned and began drifting back from where it had come. The man again laid his whip across the stream, and the mist drifted over it and across the stream just as before. It then made its way straight back to the tent of sleeping wanderers, not stopping until it was behind the man sleeping at the back of the tent. There, it disappeared. The man who had followed it then lay down and went to sleep.

When the day was mostly gone, the wanderers awoke, got up and went to their horses. They chatted over various things while harnessing their rides. Among them spoke the man who had slept at the back of the tent: "I wished that I owned what I dreamt of."

“What was it, and what did you dream of?” asked the man who had observed the blue mist.

The first man answered, “It seemed to me that I wandered over this meadow. I came to a big, beautiful house. Inside there were many people gathered together, all singing and amusing themselves, laughing and happy. I stayed in the house quite a while. When I came out again, my way led over the beautiful meadow.

“I then came to a large river that I tried unsuccessfully to cross. I then saw a monstrously large giant coming near. He had a huge beam in his hand that he laid across the river. I crossed over the river on it, and wandered a long time until I came to a huge hill. The hill had an opening and I went into it.

“There, I found nothing except a huge barrel filled with money. I stayed there a while to look at it because I have never seen such a pile of money. I then went back outside, wandering over the same path back over which I came.

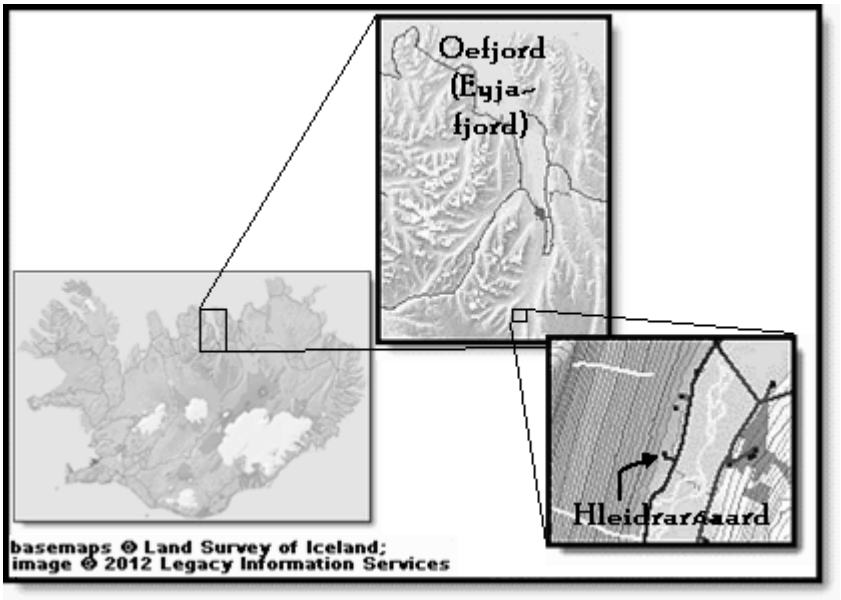
“I came again to the river, and the giant again came with the wooden beam, which he laid across the river. I crossed the beam over the river and came again back to the tent.”

The man who had followed the blue mist began to have curious ideas and so said to the man who had dreamed, “Come, comrade, let’s go for a bit and get the money.”

The other man began to laugh and thought that his friend had lost his mind. But he went with him nonetheless. They went the exact same way that the mist had traveled, coming finally to the hummock where they began to dig. Here, they uncovered a cask of gold coins.

They then returned to their other comrades, told them everything about the dream and the blue mist, and showed them the cask of gold coins.

Chapter 37. The Tailcapped Lady of Hleidrargaard



Around 1740 to 1770 there lived a farmer named Sigurd Björnsson at Hleidrargaard (Hleiðargarður, private) on Oefjord. He was thought a reasonable man, but very forceful.

People told that when he was young he once rode westward to the glacier to buy fish. It happened that he and the man from whom he bought the fish could not agree. The result was an argument that soon became a fight. Sigurd was a strong man, so it was no pleasure to be subject to his fists. He was able to throw his opponent to the ground, where he gave him a pair of blows. When the other man got up, he made threats against Sigurd, promising him earned reward before the next equinox; Sigurd then went on his way, returning home with his comrades where he remained on his farm.

At that time there lived a man named Hall at Krynarstad (Krónustaðir, private), the farm next to Hleidrargaard. He was known as Hall the Strong. He was a psychic, having often seen ghosts and having had dealings with them. It is said that in the fall following the summer when Sigurd returned home from his trip, Hall stood in his yard. He saw a ghost in the form of a maid coming along the road. She was small, wore a red bodice and dark

brown skirt reaching just to her knees, a cap with no tassel and a casual shirt.

When the maid saw Hall, she tried to avoid him. But he stood in her path and asked who she was. She told him that she was called Sigga. He asked where she came from and where she was going. She answered, “To Hleidrargaard”.

“And what business do you have there?”

“To kill Sigurd Björnsson,” she answered. She then went on her way, leaving a trail of sparks as she went.

That same evening, Sigurd was asleep in his bed, which stood where a window was above it. The rest of the household was awake and in the bath chamber. Suddenly, Sigurd sprang out of bed, ran to the bath chamber and asked, “Who called me?” They answered that no one had called him. He returned to bed and again fell asleep.

No sooner had he fallen asleep than he again jumped up and said that someone had definitely called him. Again everyone said to him that no one had called him, and so he returned to bed but was unable to go to sleep.

When he had laid there for a while, the others saw him spying through the window and heard him say, “Aha, it’s coming from there!” and then his face turned red. He then went to the bath chamber door, stood before them and they heard him say quite loudly, “If there is someone there who wants to speak with Sigurd Björnsson – he sits there!” And he then pointed to a young boy from the poorhouse named Hjalmar who sat on a chair opposite the bath chamber door, plucking wool.

The boy was suddenly thrown down from the chair to the floor, where he screamed and twisted as though he were suffocating. Sigurd grabbed a cane and beat the boy everywhere with it. The boy became somewhat quieter, and they placed him on the bed. His body was swollen and showed signs of being struck.

The boy had these attacks two or three times during the night and later from time to time, until he died of them in early winter. His body was very swollen and bloated, and showed clearly blackened traces of the fingers of a ghost.

After this time, the ghost stalked Sigurd and his children; in fact, it stalked all of the people at Hleidrargaard. Men who were psychics often saw the maid, the “Hleidrargaard lady” as she was called because of the way her cap sat on her head. Most often, people saw her hanging upside down with legs wrapped around a ceiling beam, usually over the house entrance.

Sigurd was always able to protect himself from her, but gradually she killed his livestock and even that of the neighbor. The meat was always very mottled, bluish and inedible. It is blamed for causing the death of Sigurd of Näs, a capable farmer who had an attack of cramps and died.

As her violence increased and people feared that it would become even worse, it is told that luckily, a beggar from the glacier named Peter, or “Glacier Peter” as he was generally called, came to the area. He was an accomplished magician but used his powers only for good.

Sigurd of Hleidrargaard was a good and generous man and he supported Peter, but telling him at the same time that it was not his farm for which he would thank Peter for his help, but rather that another farmer had set this ghost after him that had caused great harm not only to his farm but also others. It would very likely continue doing so until it had caused his death.

Peter promised to free him from this devil. One night, he left and took the ghost with him. He chained it to a immovable stone at a place between Strjugs Brook and Volde in the adjacent Djupidal Valley, or Varmhagi as it is called. For a long time the ghost could do no more harm, but at night one could often hear it howling. The people were afraid to pass by too closely, as they would become dizzy and lose their way even on perfectly clear days.

Between 1806 and 1810 a priest named Sira Sigurd of Saurbær who still lives today built a feed shed near this place because it had good meadow. On the first night when it was in use, a sheep was killed. This was followed by the death of a number of others.

It was found that the sheep’s body appeared in every way like those that the ghost had killed before. So people believed that it had begun again to do its dirty deeds. Sickness and death gradually began again amongst the sheep in all of Oefjord generally. Nowadays it is called the plague, but the

superstition that the ghost is at fault has since olden times taken root with the people.

Chapter 38. The Manskin Shoes

On a farm, there lived a farmer about whom there were general rumors. He had a bad reputation from the way he handled his farmhands. No hands would stay with him, whether due to the poor food or rough dealings, or that too much work was required of them. It finally happened that no one worked as a farmhand for the farmer, and that he alone did practically all the work himself.

One day a young man from the area, who although conscientious but having no regular employment, visited the farmer. He was greeted with open arms, invited in and got into a chat with the farmer about various things. They came around to talking of working for hire, and the farmer finally suggested that he work in the coming year as his farmhand.

The young man was reluctant to do so because of the poor reputation he attached to the farmer. But the farmer offered him the chance to hire on, even if it were for no longer than it would take for the young man to wear out a pair of shoes.

The man thought to himself that the shoes would not last forever, that they must wear out and so he would only be by the farmer for a short time and not his whole life. The result was, he gave the farmer his word to work for him.

The next spring when it was time for the Mass of the Holy Spirit, the young man came and the farmer gave him a pair of shoes – not very sturdy ones – and told him that when he had worn them out, his time of service was ended if he so chose. But the farmer also said that his new hand must wear another pair of shoes that the farmer would give him each time he went to church. The young man amiably agreed to this condition.

A long time went by, and after a year the shoes still showed no wear; in fact, they appeared as on the day when the young man first put them on. He became very depressed, and he regretted making his promise. Still, he thought it shameful to break it and leave although his life by the farmer was painful and unpleasant.

So he remained another year with the farmer but even then, the shoes showed no noticeable wear although for the last two years he had worn no other shoes except when attending church. The boy wondered about the

matter greatly and imagined that this all was somehow not right; still, he didn’t know what manner of magic trick had been used against him.

One Sunday as he was beginning his third year, the young farmhand stayed home and did not attend church. As a result, he was not given other shoes as usual for attending church. After most of the people, including the farmer, had gone to church the farmhand began to consider his fate, and wondered when his servitude would ever end.

As he sat at home pondering his situation, a stranger came by. He noticed that the farmhand was very worried, and so asked him what the matter was and why he had not gone with the rest of the people to church.

The farmhand answered that he had no desire to attend church; instead, he was sitting and pondering his unpleasant situation. The stranger said that this was no excuse for staying away from church just because he felt burdened. Everyone has their cross to bear, and his difficulties would not be made lighter by staying away from church.

The stranger said that he should go immediately, that the day was not so far along that he would be too late for the services. Besides, said the stranger, services would be delayed today because earlier there had been a burial.

The young farmhand said that he still could not go because he lacked shoes for church. The stranger countered that he could certainly attend church with the shoes on his feet.

“No,” replied the farmhand, “I promised never to wear them when attending church as long as I serve at this farm. Every time I go to church I have been given other shoes to wear, but today I asked for none because I was not going.”

The stranger asked him how long he had been working here.

“Much too long,” replied the young farmhand with a sigh. “My third year has just begun.”

“Don’t you like working here?” asked the stranger.

“Not at all!” answered the hand. “It is my greatest unhappiness to have been here so long.”

“Then what’s keeping you here?” asked the stranger.

“My promise,” the young man answered. He then told the stranger how things had come to pass.

When the stranger heard his tale, he said that the young man should go immediately to church, and he should definitely wear the shoes he was wearing. He should go directly to the grave that was dug today, stick the shoes he wears into the earth and wait to see what happens. The shoes that he wore are made from the skin of an old woman’s back, and they would last into eternity even if he became an old man.

The young hand thanked the stranger for his wise counsel, wished him well and left immediately for church. When he came to the church, he noticed that his shoes suddenly burst at the seams as soon as he came into the churchyard. They fell from his feet and nothing more remained of them other than the trim and laces.

Carrying the tattered remains of the shoes, the young hand went into the church just as the priest had approached the altar. When the service was over, he went to the farmer and showed him the remainder of the shoes, that nothing more remained other than the trimming, and with that gave his notice to quit his service.

The farmer said nothing more other than, “So you haven’t stayed away from church today without good reason!”

Chapter 39. Tales of Saemund the Wise

Translator's note: Saemund the Wise or the Learned (Saemund Sigfússon, 1056-1133) was an Icelandic scholar and priest who was credited with compiling the elder (poetic) Edda containing the basis of Norse mythology in written form called the Codex Regius. Saemund created a center of learning at his home at Odda, Iceland. His grandson Jon Loftson was the foster father and mentor of Iceland's most renowned author Snorre Sturluson.

The lore surrounding Saemund has gone from factual to mythic and has raised him to the level of, as Wikipedia says, "...a larger than life character". A part of that lore has Saemund studying in various places in Europe in pursuit of not only ecclesiastical knowledge but also magic. These first two tales deal with the Black School, a mythical place of learning of the black arts and witchcraft where Saemund is said to have received his schooling.

1. The Black School

Translator's note: References here and in later tales to Halvdan Einarsson, a major contributor to Icelandic literature who lived from1732 to 1785, should rather be to Halvdan (Halfdan) Narfason. The latter lived in the 16th century and was both priest and according to legend also a practitioner of magic and "galdr" —one who invokes spells through incantation. I have changed the name of Einarsson in the original text to Narfason to avoid confusion.

In the old days somewhere out in the world was a school called The Black School. There, one learned the magical arts and other wisdom. The school was held in a very strong earthen house in which there were no windows. For this reason, there was only the deepest darkness.

There was no teacher; one learned only from books written in fire red letters that could be read in the dark. No one who was a student there could go outside or see the light of day as long as they were there. Still, they were required to remain either three or seven winters to learn their art.

Every day, a grey and scraggly hand appeared through the wall to give the students their meals. Those to whom the school belonged kept as their own from those who left the school each year the one student who was last to leave.

As all of the students knew that the devil was the schoolmaster, each student wanted to avoid being the last to leave the school, as much as it was in their power to do so.

One time, there were three Icelanders in the Black School: Saemund the Wise, Kalb Arneson and Halfdan Eldjernsson, or Einarsson (i.e., Narfason), who later was priest at Fell in Sletteli. They were to leave the school at the

same time, and Saemund offered to be the last one to leave. Of course, the other two agreed fully with his offer.

When the time came, Saemund donned a large cape that he did not button and on which he let the sleeves hang freely. To leave the school, it was necessary to climb steps. When Saemund had climbed the steps, the devil grasped Saemund's cape and said, "You are mine!"

Saemund threw the cape free, leaving the devil with only it in his hand. But the iron door groaned on its hinges, hitting Saemund so hard on his feet that his heels were injured. So he yelled, "The door hit me on the heels!" which later became a common expression. And thus did Saemund and his companions escape from the Black School.

However, others say that as Saemund the Wise went up the stairs and came to the door of the Black School, the sun shone on him and cast his shadow on the wall. When the devil tried to grab Saemund, he said, "I'm not the last one! Can't you see that another comes behind me?" The devil then grabbed at the shadow, taking it for another student. Saemund managed to get out and the door then struck him on the heels.

And so from that day, on, Saemund never cast a shadow because the devil refused to give it back to him.

2. How Saemund Escaped from the Black School[(21)]

During Saemund's foreign travels back when he attended the Black School, it happened that he forgot all about those he met, his nature, his family and his heritage. He even forgot his name, and so he was called Buft in the school.

One night while Saemund was asleep in his bunk he dreamt that Boge Einarsson came to him and said, "You are behaving badly, Saemund. You have come to this school, forgotten your God, surrendered yourself and forgotten your given name. If you care about the wellbeing of your eternal soul, it is most advisable for you to turn back."

"I will very likely not be able to do that," answered Saemund.

"It was unmanly of you," said Boge, "to go to a school that you cannot leave when you wish to!"

"In this matter, I have no fear," said Saemund, "because you are smart enough for us all, Boge."

“Then you should follow my advice,” said Boge. “If you want to escape, leave your cape hanging loosely on your shoulders, and so will you be able to leave. Here, you must fear the schoolmaster who leads the school because he will soon miss you. But once you have escaped, take the shoe from your right foot, fill it with blood and carry it in this way on your head for the first day.

“But when evening comes, the schoolmaster will go outside and read the stars. He is knowledgeable in the movement of heavenly bodies and he will seek your star. He will believe that you are dead, killed by a sword. It will appear to him as though a ring of blood surrounds your star.

“During the day he will not try to spy on your path; I will see to that. But on the second day before you begin your travels, fill you shoe with water and salt. That way, when the schoolmaster sees your star he will think that you drowned in the sea; it will appear to him as though the ocean flows around your star.

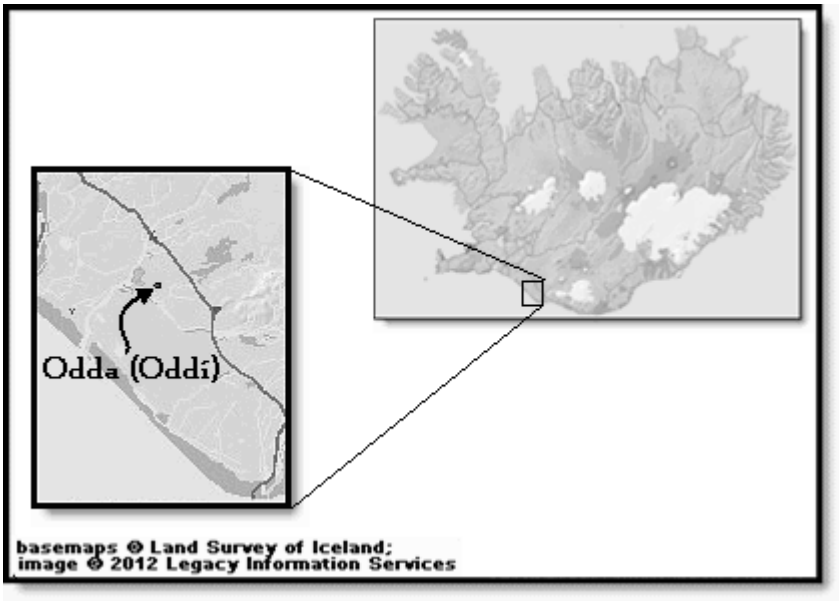
“And before you begin your travels on the third day, either you or someone else will let blood flow from the place where the back meets the side, letting it flow into your shoe. Then, take earth and mix it with the blood. Speak a good word over it so that it is consecrated. Wear the shoe the whole day on your head.

“When the schoolmaster studies your star, he will see a ball of earth around it and think that you are dead and buried. This will appear to him to be a big event. Soon, he will discover that you are fully alive, and he will be astounded by your wisdom and think that he himself taught you. He will then wish you every good fortune. And so will you have escaped your difficulty”

In this way was Saemund able to escape from the Black School and return to his homeland.

21. Translator’s note: This fictional tale is a variation on an equally fictitious story of what is likely the real story of Saemund’s time of study in Europe, where he “lost himself” in his pursuits and with it, his sense of origin. A relative, Jon Ogmundson, is said to have found him and encouraged him to return to Iceland where he formed a place of study at Odda (Oddí). Some older literature says the Black School was in Padua, Italy. Appendix A has another version of this tale.

3. How Saemund Became Priest at Odda



When Saemund, Kalb and Halfdan left the Black School, the priest's position at Odda had become open. Each of them asked the Danish king to grant him the priesthood. The king knew very well whom he was dealing with, and so he said that the first one who arrived in Iceland would become the priest's office.

As soon as Saemund heard this, he called the devil and said to him, "Swim with me to Iceland, and if you bring me on land without getting my coattail wet, then my soul is yours!" The devil agreed and so took the form of a seal, then swam away with Saemund on his back. On the way, Saemund read continuously from a hymnal.

Soon they were near Iceland. Saemund then struck the seal on the head with the hymnal so that it sank, while he dove down and swam to land.

And so in this way the devil received his due while Saemund was granted the priest's position in Odda.

4. How Saemund Brought In his Hay during Dry Weather

Saemund once had a large amount of dry hay on the meadow, and it threatened rain. So he asked all of his people to work hard to gather the hay together before the rain began.

Near him in Odda, there lived an old lame woman named Thorhildur. The priest went to her with the request that she hobble out to the field and rake together whatever hay was left behind. She promised to attempt the work, took her rake in the hand and tied on the hood that she usually wore and limped out of the house.

Before leaving, she said to Priest Saemund that he himself should be in the hay yard to receive the hay because the farmhands would not need much time to tie it up and carry it home. The priest promised to heed her advice, thinking to himself that that would be best.

But no sooner was the old woman in the field than she stuck the end of her rake under each haystack and said, “Go to the hay yard!” These were words of magic, because each stack that the old woman lifted with the rake handle flew instantly to the hay yard. Saemund said to the devil and all his little devils that it would probably be best quickly to arrange the hay in stacks.

It was not long before they had all the dry hay in the hay yard. Later, Saemund said to the old woman, “You can do more than even Our Father, little Thorhildur!”

She replied, “There is sadly no longer much more remaining, as most of what I knew in my youth I’ve now forgotten.”

5. How Saemund Took the Devil into his Service

Saemund the Priest once asked the devil how small he could make himself. The devil answered that he could make himself as small as a mosquito. Saemund then took a borer and bored a hole in a beam. He then offered the devil a chance to crawl into the hole, which he did in very little time.

Hardly was he in the hole when Saemund stuck a stopper into it. Then, no matter how much the devil cried, howled and begged Saemund refused to remove the stopper from the hole before the devil had promised him always to do whatever Saemund demanded of him.

That is why Saemund could always bring the devil to do whatever Saemund wished of him.

6. How Saemund Perplexed the Devil when He Changed into a Fly

The devil was always envious of Saemund the Wise. It angered the devil that whatever the two did, the devil always got the worst of things. So he tried every way he knew to get revenge on the priest but he never managed it.

Once he changed himself into a very small fly, and then hid beneath the cream on top of the milk in the priest's bowl, hoping in this way to get inside Saemund and kill him.

When the priest took the bowl in his hand, he immediately discovered the fly. So he stirred the cream around the fly, and then stretched the birth sac of a newborn calf over the bowl. He then laid the whole package on the altar. The fly then had to content himself with waiting while the priest read the mass. When the mass was over, Saemund opened the package, letting the devil escape.

It is certain that the devil held it for the worst matter he had ever endured: having to lie on the altar while Saemund the Priest read the mass.

7. The Devil's Flute

Saemund the Wise had a flute. When one blew on it, one or more small devils would come to the player and ask what they should do.

Saemund once left the flute in bed under his pillow where he usually hid it. In the evening, he asked the housemaid to make his bed as usual, but warned her that if she found something unusual in his bed, that she should not touch it but rather leave it where it lay.

The maid began making his bed, and hardly had she found the flute when curiosity began to get the better of her. So she took it in her hand while looking around her everywhere, and then finally she blew on it. Immediately, a little devil came to her and asked, "What should I do?" The maid was frightened, but did not show it.

On the same day, it happened that ten of Saemund's sheep had been slaughtered and the hides lay in front of the door. So the maid ordered the little devil to go outside and count all of the hair strands on the hides, and when it was finished with that before the maid had finished making the bed then she would be his for the pleasure.

Greatly motivated, the little devil immediately went outside and began eagerly to count, while the maid rushed to make the bed. When she was

finished, the little devil still had one hide to count and so missed his reward.

Later, Saemund asked the housemaid if she hadn't found anything in the bed. She told him everything as it had happened, but instead of being angry, Saemund was pleased with her presence of mind.

8. The Devil as Stableboy

Saemund the Wise was lacking a stableboy, so he brought the devil and put him in the barn to protect the stall. Everything went well, and the devil completed his tasks promptly until spring.

But on the first Easter holiday, while Sira Saemund stood in the pulpit, the devil gathered all of the manure in a pile before the church door so that the priest could not exit the church after the mass.

When Saemund saw what had been done, he summoned the devil before him and made the devil bring the manure back to the barn whether he wanted to or not. Specifically, the priest made the devil complete the task by licking the remnants up with his tongue.

The devil licked so strongly that in the stepstone before the church door there was left a hollow. The stone is still in Odda, although only a fourth of it remains. It now lies in front of the main house, and even today, one can see the depression in the stone.

9. How Saemund the Wise broke his Stableboy of Cursing

Saemund once employed a stableboy who had the bad habit of cursing, and Saemund often reprimanded him for it. He told the stableboy that the devil and his little helpers lived from curses and bad words.

"I would honestly never again say a bad word," said the stableboy, "if I knew that so doing, the devil would starve."

"And I will soon learn if you mean that earnestly or not," replied Saemund.

So Saemund placed a little devil in the stall. The stableboy was not pleased with his company because the little devil did everything he could to tease and to anger him. The stableboy had great difficulty avoiding cursing the devil.

But the stableboy persevered, and he soon saw that with each day the little devil grew slimmer. The stableboy was very pleased when he saw this,

and so no longer cursed.

One morning when he came into the stall, the stableboy found everything wrecked and the cows, of which there were many, bound together by their tails. So he approached the little devil, which was such pitiful and poor condition, and heaped the most abusive curses on the little devil out of great anger.

To the stableboy's sorrow and distress, he then watched how the little devil became strong and suddenly so round and plump as though he lacked for nothing and was again strong and feisty. The stableboy became very quiet and stopped his cursing, for he saw that Saemund the priest had spoken the truth. So he gave up cursing completely and never again said a bad word.

The little devil, which lived from bad words and curses, is now long dead and turned to dust.

And it would be the best for you and for me if we also did as the stableboy.

10. The Devil and the Stupid Lad

A young lad who people believed was incapable of learning was brought to Sira Saemund to be trained in religion. But the boy was very limited, and had great difficulty understanding things. He was quite depressed by it and sometimes wished that he had intelligence.

One night, the boy dreamt that a man came to him and asked him if he wished for him to give the boy intelligence. It seemed to the boy as though he said yes to the offer. The man demanded as compensation that in the coming spring during the Mass of the Cross the boy work in his service. The lad agreed, and the man disappeared.

After that night, learning was so easy for the boy that Priest Saemund was almost astounded by him. But at the same time, the boy had become someone else than he was before. Now, he was sad and depressed. The priest noticed this and so began to enquire after the reason for this change.

For some time, the boy would say nothing about it, but finally he told the priest how things had happened. The priest was quite alarmed and said that the man of whom he had dreamt was no man but more likely the devil who

wished to lure the boy into his net. But nonetheless the priest told the boy to be of good spirit, and to deal with the matter as smartly as he could.

The winter passed and the time for the Mass of the Cross was approaching. On the evening before the mass, Saemund told the boy to follow him to church. When they had arrived, the priest led the boy up to the altar, dressed him in the robes for the mass, handed him the vessel of the host and the chalice and told him to turn around.

He told him to remain standing where he was without moving and to everyone who approached him to offer bread and wine. And if anyone approaches him and does not take the bread and wine, he is not to speak. Even if Saemund himself approaches him, he is not to speak to him if Saemund does not eat the bread or drink the wine. Saemund then left, and the lad did just as the priest had ordered.

After he had stood at the altar for a time, the same man came to him that he had seen in his dream. He said that he had come to get him. He told him to take off the mass robe immediately and to put down the things he held in his hands. The boy did not reply, but instead offered the man bread and wine. But the man said that he had not come to take evening vespers with him, and then demanded strongly that the boy should come with him.

The boy would not let himself be misled, and so the man left without success. It then appeared to the lad as though many of his friends came one after the other to him and told him in both good and bad words to leave from where he stood. He offered them all both bread and wine, but none of them wished to eat or drink.

It then appeared to him that Priest Saemund himself came to him and asked angrily, why he was standing there. The priest told him immediately to remove his robe, to put down the things he held and to come with him. The lad did not answer the priest, but instead only offered him the bread and wine. The priest made a cynical face and said that he was not there to receive charity from the boy’s hand. Then he, too, disappeared.

Then it seemed to the boy that all types of ghosts and monsters, even devils, came to him and it was as though the church itself shook and swayed. He believed that it might at any moment simply collapse or sink into the earth, and he was so horrified that he came within a hair of letting the vessel and chalice fall from his hands and fleeing to a safer place.

Then he heard the bells ringing, and all of the specters that he believed he saw with his own eyes disappeared. Priest Saemund entered the church, approached the altar and tasted both the bread and the wine. He then said to the lad that every danger had passed and that no one else would appear to him.

The lad was greatly happy over his release, and thanked the priest as best he could. From this time on, he was very grateful to Saemund, and it is told that he kept his intelligence until his dying day and was an exceptional man.

11. The Wish Moment

Saemund the Wise once told that in every day there was a wish moment that lasted no longer than a second, and so for a person it was hardly possible to expect it. On the other hand, others tell that the wish moment happened only on Saturdays.

One day, Saemund sat in the bath hall while his housemaids were also there busily working. He suddenly said to her, “Pay attention, girls, the wish moment has now come. Make a wish for what you most want!”

One of the maids began to sing, saying:

“Of all in this world around

I may wish for most?

I wish most that Saemund

gives me seven sons!”

“You should die when you bear the last one!” cried out Saemund, who was angry with the girl for such a wish. This maid was named Gudrun and was Saemund’s second wife. She bore seven sons, just as she had wished. But the woman died in her birth bed after having the last son.

Saemund kept the dress that Gudrun had worn as his housekeeper, and often held it up for her to look at to dampen her pride because she was very egotistical over their marriage for the honor she had gained from it. As testament to her ego, it is told that once when a poor man came to her and asked for a refreshing drink, she answered:

“It’s best, look, the stream flows by

Drink like the bishop’s horse there!”

12. Saemund the Wise on his Deathbed

Saemund had taken on a poor man's little girl as a foster daughter. He was overjoyed by her and loved her more than almost all else. He always had her nearby and never wished to be separated from her.

As he was lying in bed and near to taking his last breath, he let her lie on the foot of his bed because he thought she would make the best witness to his death. As he lay there ill, he realized that this was to be his place of death. At the same time, the girl could see that he was fearful and full of doubt about whether or not after his death he would enjoy heaven's bliss or if he would go elsewhere.

In the evening, before he died, he asked his foster daughter to remain by him at night and to be very watchful and not fall asleep. His thoughts told him that this would be the night when he dies, and if this were the case then signs would appear telling what would become of him in the other world. So he asked her to observe everything exactly so that she could tell his family and friends to which place of spiritual rest he had gone.

After he had said this, he became quiet and began to sleep while the girl faithfully kept watch by him. During the night she saw that the attic room where she kept watch filled with little devils. It appeared to her as though they tried to tempt Saemund with promises into something evil, but from his words and manner she decided that he wanted to do nothing to satisfy them.

When the devils were unable to get the desired results, they tried to bring Saemund to do evil with threats. But he withstood this in a manly way just as he had done before. Then, the devils disappeared, but they were hardly away than the room filled with hungry mosquitoes that attacked Saemund. By this time he had lost so much strength that he was unable to defend himself against them or drive them away.

But as the mosquito swarm bit him severely, she watched as a beam of light rose from his eyes. She then knew that it was his soul rising to the holy domain. Then the mosquito swarm disappeared, and Saemund the Wise slept his final sleep.

Chapter 40. Sagas of Kalf Arneson

Translator's note: Kalf Arneson (var.: Kalb or Kalv - 995 – 1051) was instrumental in the history of the Norse kings as both friend and foe. The death blow that killed St. Olav (Olav Haraldson) in 1030 is attributed to Kalf, who is later exiled from Norway by King Magnus the Good but then repatriated by King Harald Hardrade (Harold Sigurdsson, brother of St. Olaf). Kalf died in a battle in Denmark where he was sent by King Harald – thought to be an act of revenge by the king. Inasmuch as Kalf died before Saemund the Wise was born there is little likelihood of Kalf having consorted with Saemund, or even of having lived in Iceland. How the tale of their relationship came to be is a question yet to be resolved, if ever.

1. How Kalf Misled the Devil

It is told that Kalf Arneson committed himself to the devil while he was at the Black School. Once he had returned to Iceland, he had no greater wish than to be released from this promise, but what he should do to accomplish this he had no idea.

Finally, he sought an answer by visiting Saemund the Wise to ask for his advice for escaping the situation. Saemund advised him to get a steer calf and to name it Arne. He should then take another calf bred from the first steer, raise it and name it Kalf and so "… it would be Kalf Arneson."

Kalf followed the advice that Saemund had given him. After some time the devil came to, as he said, take Kalf Arneson. Kalf told the devil that there was nothing to prevent him doing so and then got the calf that he had raised from the first steer. He gave it to the devil with the words, "Here is Kalf Arneson."

The devil was unable to object, and although to his mind it was a poor fulfillment of Kalf's promise, he had to put a good face on a bad game and let Kalf Arneson go free and die after reaching an honorable old age.

2. Kalf Visits Saemund the Wise

Another time, Kalf Arneson wanted to visit Saemund the Wise in Odda. He told his people that he would try to appear completely unexpected to surprise Saemund. Nothing more is told of Kalf's trip until he arrived at Odda at night and knocked very quietly on Saemund's door.

Saemund heard the knock and ordered one of his houseboys to answer it to see who the visitor was. The boy went outside but found no one there. So he returned inside and said that no one stood outside.

A knock came a second time, and Saemund ordered another houseboy to go to the door. The boy obeyed, and as he could see no one outside he went

around the whole house but saw no one. So unsuccessful, he returned inside again and said that he had seen no one outside.

There came a third time a knock at the door. This time, Saemund sprang up, saying that he would certainly be the one who wished to speak with the visitor. So he went out and saw his comrade Kalf Arneson standing outside and the two offered friendly greetings to each other.

Kalf asked for a place to spend the night, and he naturally wasn't refused as one well may imagine. He also asked Saemund to hobble (22) his horse, so Saemund began searching for a hobble. Kalf said that is actually a shame to ask Saemund to hobble his horse but he believed that he must ask him to do so.

Saemund said that he would certainly do so and went about it right away. But after some time had passed, he was still having trouble. Kalf acted surprised how long it took to hobble a horse and so asked Saemund if he knew how to do it.

Saemund replied that of course he knew how, but that he couldn't find any legs under the horse. Kalf said that they stuck out of the horse's stomach underneath, just as for any other horse. Saemund replied that this may be, but that this horse had no legs, or at least he couldn't find any.

A good amount of time passed while Saemund continued to search for the horse's legs until finally he gave up this task so that no one knows if he hobbled the horse or not.

At any rate, Saemund invited Kalf to come inside, who accepted the invitation gladly. Saemund led the way with a candle and then waited at the end of the hallway for Kalf. But Kalf was still delayed outside.

After some time had passed, Saemund's wife came out and asked him who had arrived. Saemund told her. She then asked him if he had offered the guest to come inside, and Saemund replied that he had long since done so. She wanted to go outside herself and again invite Kalf to come into the house, but Saemund would not have it; he would soon come in, he said.

Again a good bit of time went by, and then Kalf finally came inside, totally out of breath. He asked Saemund's wife to bring him a large drink. "Do you need much to drink?" asked Saemund. Kalf answered, "It could

easily happen that others besides me must drink before the evening has passed.”

They led Kalf into the parlor, served him something to eat and a knife for dining. But when he tried to cut with the knife, it was very dull. Saemund asked him if the knife wasn’t sharp, and Kalf replied that it wasn’t. Saemund’s wife said that it was not her intention to provide him with one of her poorest knives, and that this knife must be sharp.

Saemund asked for the knife, intending to whet it. Kalf gave him the knife. When Saemund had finished whetting the knife he gave it back to Kalf and said that Kalf should be cautious with it because he believed that it was quite sharp enough. Kalf replied that he was not afraid. But as he went to cut the first piece, the knife cut through the board and table and deep into his thigh.

Saemund said that he had implored him to be careful, that the knife was very sharp. Kalf replied that the wound was not deadly, and he then bandaged it.

In those days it was the custom to read a table prayer both before and after the meal. While Kalf read the table prayer after his meal, Saemund suddenly fell from his chair as though dead. Kalf ordered that he immediately be doused with water. With this, Saemund recovered and when Kalf suggested that he drink some water he did so immediately.

Kalf then said, “Didn’t I say that someone other than I would have to drink something this evening when I asked for a large drink after I had searched for the door until I was tired?" They then stopped the teasing, and chatted together over which of them was the cleverest.

Later, Kalf would tell that Saemund learned more at the Black School than he and so could do more than Kalf.

22. Translator’s note: To hobble is to bind either the horse’s forelegs or hind legs together to allow the some movement for grazing, etc., but to prevent galloping, and is sometimes done in place of tethering by the bridle.

3. How Kalf Sent the Devil for the Priest

Kalf once had a serious and dangerous sickness. The devil came to him where he was staying and told him that he intended to be present if he died and by previous agreement with Kalf, would take his soul.

Kalf replied that this time he would probably not die. Nonetheless, he asked the devil to get a priest who was not a mercenary and not to be in a hurry because, so he said, his condition would last for a while.

At this, the devil became quiet and thought that it would not be an easy task to find such a man. Kalf replied that the devil would not have him, Kalf, if the devil could not bring such a priest and so their agreement would be invalid.

The devil then left and was gone some time. He looked carefully but found no priest who was not also mercenary. With much trouble and after a long search, however, he brought a priest to Kalf whom he said he had found far away in a foreign land. Although this priest was not without greed, there was only one priest living in Germany who was reputed to not be a mercenary but that the devil was unable to approach him because of the glowing fires that surrounded him.

Kalf said that he wanted nothing to do with the priest that the devil had brought him as he was not fully without greed and so the devil had no claim of payment.

4. Kalf's Death

When Kalf had reached a very old age, he became very ill, and knew ahead of time that this sickness would be his death. So he asked everyone in his house to leave the farm, and to close the room door but to leave the key in the door lock.

He also told them to return after a specific time, but not to bother if they found that various things on the farm in disorder and disarray, but if everything in his bedroom still is as before then they should bury him with full honors. But if they find anything in his room destroyed or broken then they should bury his body anywhere just as any other.

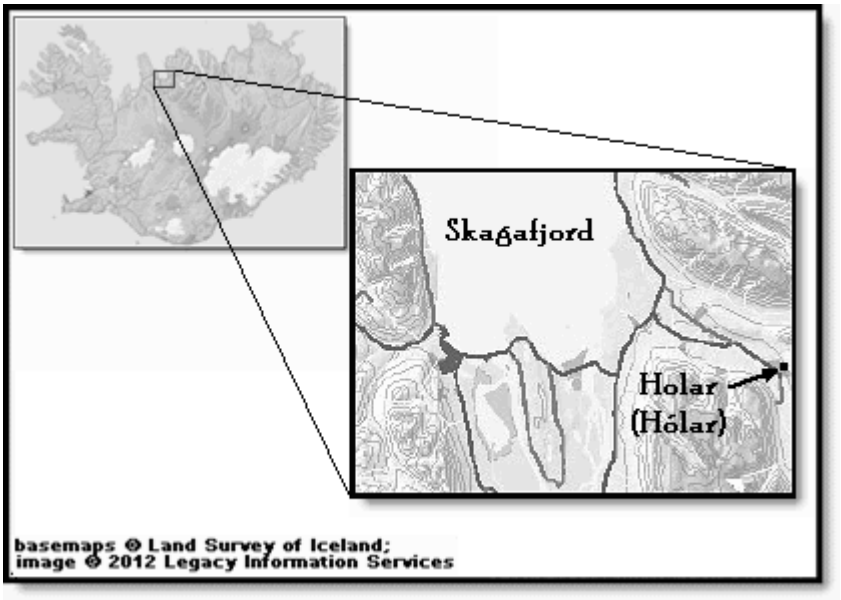
Kalf had a foster son named Arne whom he loved dearly. He did not want to leave the farm with the others and so hid behind the farm wall when the others left. After a short time, Arne saw the devil coming. First, he went around the whole farm wall and then into the yard where for some time he jumped and sprang around. Finally, the devil went inside the house where he again sprang and jumped, causing much damage.

After some time passed, Arne sneaked into the house, opened the door to the room where his foster father Kalf was lying. Kalf lay dead, but

everything in the room was where it had stood earlier; Arne saw nothing of the devil.

Kalf Arneson was buried in the churchyard with all honors, just as he had requested.

Chapter 41. Gudbjart Floke and the Bishop of Holar



The priest Gudbjart Floke of Laufaas was the cleverest man of his time. But because he was very good-natured, he never used his art(23) to injure anyone.

Still, the catholic bishop of Holar took offense at the rumors of sorcerer that the priest had attracted, and so made a decision to have him defrocked. So the bishop set out with an entourage of priests and other young people for this purpose.

But when they had gone only a short distance, they lost their directions and had no idea of which way to go. They only discovered where they were when they arrived back at home in Holar behind the wall around the bishopric.

Nonetheless, they again struck out a second time. This time, the bishop and his men were already north of the Hjaltetal Heath when on a perfectly clear day they were surprised by a blizzard with strong winds and frost. Suddenly they felt an overwhelming need to correct their situation; but when they wanted to again press onward, they were unable to do so.

Soon they were close to freezing to death, and saw no other way out for rescue other than to promise themselves to return home.

The people celebrated the bishop's journey, but Gudbjart did not; he said that he did not believe that he was the one whom the bishop sought since for that purpose he would not have needed such a large entourage.

Some time later, the bishop and another man traveled to Oefjord (Eyjafjord) and took the opportunity to make a side trip to Gudbjart's home. This time, all went well and when they arrived, no one was outside. So the bishop went right inside where he saw the priest sitting at the table with his head resting on his hands and a book in front of him.

The bishop took the book, but no matter how he turned and held it he saw only blank pages. The bishop asked the priest what he would use the book for, and the priest replied that it served as a place to write sermons. "So! Sermons!" replied the bishop sarcastically, "you who prays to the devil!"

Hardly had the bishop spoken his last word as he saw a grave opening out of which a bluish flame emerged. The bishop was standing on the outermost edge while a grey hand reached up and grasped the skirt of his cloak, trying to pull him into the flames. The bishop uttered a cry and said, "Help me, in the name of God, priest!"

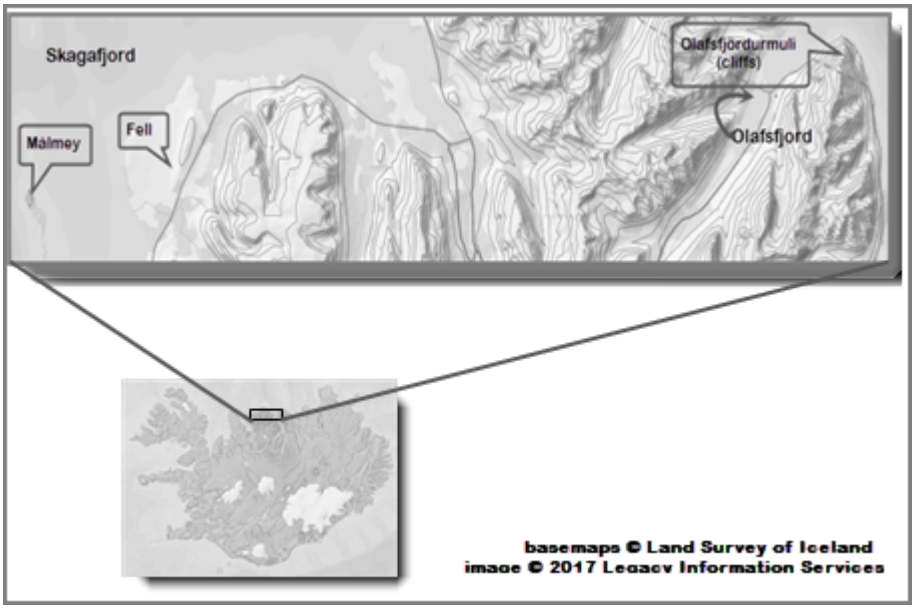
Gudbjart reached out his hand and said, "Let him go, Satan!" With that, everything was as before. The priest then said, "It is no longer unusual that evil is close to those who carry the devil's name in their speech instead of beseeching God to protect this house. I'm used to doing that, but still you accuse me of deserting the true belief."

After that, the bishop was more moderate in his speech, and they talked long together and finally parted in friendship. From that time, on, the bishop said that he could only wish that others were as God-fearing as the good Gudbjart.

But after that, no one noticed that the good priest Gudbjart practiced his sorcery any longer.

23. Translator's note: A number of heathen priests adopted Christian beliefs and even became catholic priests following the conversion of Iceland in 1000 a.d. But some continued practicing the old heathen magic and beliefs, which was allowed in private by law for a time after the formal proclamation for Christianity at the althing (Iceland's form of parliament that met three times each year) in 1000AD.

Chapter 42. The Woman from Málmey



It is said that a curse on the farm on Málmey in Skagafjord was so burdensome that no one could stay there longer than twenty years.

During the time of Priest Halvdan Narfason there lived a farmer named Jon at Málmey. He settled there as a young man and had never run another farm. Now, twenty years had passed during which he was able to remain there without danger. Because he was a courageous man and not very superstitious, and he had inherited the farm from his father and had nothing but good days there, he had no desire to leave.

The 21st year passed until just before Christmas and still nothing unusual had occurred. But on the day before Christmas Eve, the man’s wife disappeared and no one could discover what had become of her in spite of everyone looking near and far.

Farmer Jon was very upset, and wanted to find out an exact explanation for what had become of his wife. So he went to Priest Halvdan at Fell. When he arrived there, he expressed the desire to speak with the priest. He then told him his plight.

The priest said that he could certainly tell him what had become of his wife and where she was, but it would not help him to learn this because

from now on he would find no happiness with his wife.

Jon asked if the priest could arrange for him to see his wife. “My heart would be lightened if I could see her and learn where she is,” he said. The priest replied that he would not fulfill his wish happily, but he would certainly do so because Jon pleaded so strongly. So he told Jon that on specific days he should come back after everyone had gone to bed. So the farmer returned to his house on Málmey, satisfied that things had taken a better turn.

When he returned on the chosen day to Fell, the priest was already prepared and ready to travel. The farmer saw a harnessed grey horse standing north of the churchyard. The priest went to the horse, mounted it and then told the farmer to get on behind him. “But avoid saying a single word,” said the priest, “regardless of whatever you might see and no matter what happens. If you do, it can cost you your life!”

With that, the priest rode away with the farmer behind him, who wondered at the rapid speed of the racing horse. They took the shortest route east heading directly toward Olafsfjord and the cliffs of Olafsfjördurmuli. The farmer was surprised, and once when the horse bucked and then ducked its head he was startled and gave a cry. The priest called out loudly, “We came close to a cliff, now keep quiet!” – which since then has become an expression when a horse stumbles and looses its balance.

Nothing further is told of their ride until they were north of Olafsfjördurmuli on land where the powerful steep cliffs are located. Here, the priest and the farmer dismounted and the priest went to the cliffside, took a branch and beat on the cliff walls.

After a few moments the mountainside opened and out stepped two huldre women clothed in blue, leading Jon’s wife between them. She was unrecognizable, and hardly resembled her old self. Her face was swollen, black and blue and her whole appearance was that of a troll woman. On her forehead was a sign of the cross that had her original skin color. Later, Priest Halvdan explained when asked that this was the only sign of her earlier personage.

When the woman had come out of the mountain, she said, “So, you’ve come here, Jon. What do you want?” The farmer was dumbstruck, but the

priest asked him if he wanted to take his wife back with him or if he had anything that he wanted to say. “No,” the farmer said.

The priest then directed the women back into the mountain, the passage he then locked behind them and making the door closed so forcefully that these women would never again harm anyone.

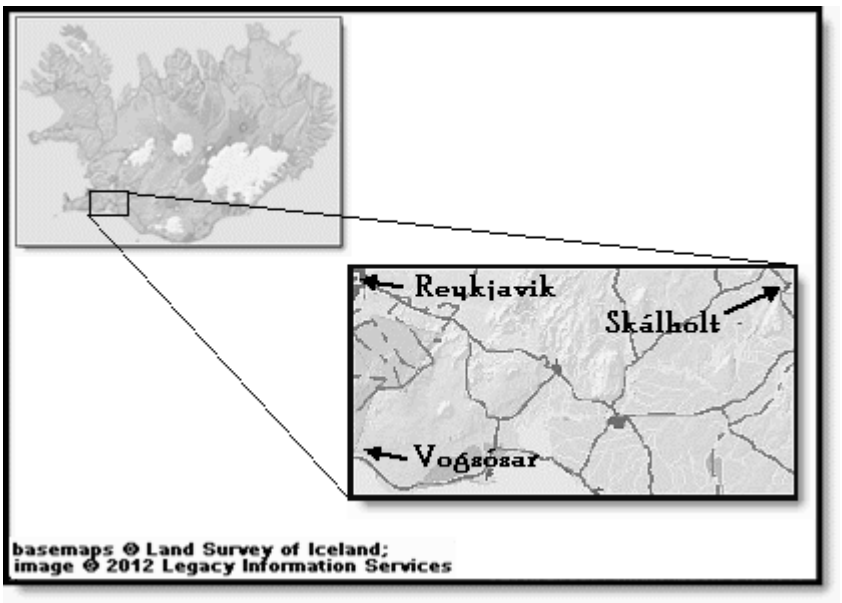
Later, Priest Halvdan himself said that he had not plugged all crevices because it was not his intention to prevent someone going in, only that no one came out. From that time, on, the place where Priest Halvdan opened the way into the mountain has been called Halvdan’s Door (Hàlfdanarhurð, now a tunnel entrance beneath Olafsfjördurmuli). Believers tell that the place is red and does not appear like the other parts of the mountain. Especially below there are unusually large cracks where to this time no priest dares to venture.

The priest and the farmer returned the same way that they had come, reaching Fell before people had arisen. They dismounted from the horse north of the churchyard on the same place where they had mounted, and the priest unharnessed the grey horse.

After removing the harness, he struck the horse on the rump. The horse became angry and kicked toward the priest with its hind legs. The priest jumped to one side and the blow struck the churchyard wall, the hoof making an opening that was never again properly repaired in spite of all efforts to do so.

It is also said that from this time on, no one from Málmey had a mishap; but then no one ever stayed there more than twenty years.

Chapter 43. Sagas of Erik the Priest of Vogsosar



Translator's notes: Erik, or Eiríkur in old Norse, lived from 1638 – 1716 and was an ordained priest at Vogsosar in Iceland at the time of transition between waning heathen beliefs and the full establishment of Christianity. Tales say that pragmatically, Erik (and other Nordic men of the church – see note 23, Chapter 41) was faithful to the ecclesiastical dogma but was not above resorting to the old ways of black arts, if needed, as these tales tell.

The stories of how Erik acquired his knowledge of witchcraft but nonetheless ascended to a position in the church vary. Generally, it is said that before Erik's time there lived an old hermit at Biskupstungar who practiced heathen ways. The old hermit possessed a book, the contents of which no one knew, and a prized heifer. When he died, both were buried with him in Skalholt.

Years later, three young boys in the cathedral school at Skalholt, one named Bogi, another Magnus and the third our Erik, took it upon themselves to learn the old ways. Having heard of the old man and his book of magic, one night they exhumed him from his grave. But by raising the old man from his grave, his ghost appeared with the book under his arm.

The boys tried to free the book from under the ghost's arm, but only Erik was able to do so. Erik read the book until morning light of the next day, and then closed it and gave it back to the its owner's spirit, who immediately sank back into his grave. The other two boys asked Erik what

he had learned from the book, to which he answered, “Enough to know that if I had read any further, the devil would own my soul.”

It is said that Erik then compiled his own book from memory. Others say that all three boys contributed to the secret book of spells that became known as the Grey Book, which remained in the church at Skalholt. Following ordination, Erik became the priest at Vogsosar near Selvogur. Eventually it was told that Erik was knowledgable in witchcraft, and so was summoned by the local bishop who now had the, to him unreadable, Grey Book. The bishop asked Erik to state honestly if he knew what was meant by the signs in the book, to which Erik swore, “I know nothing of these signs.”

Later, however, it is told that Erik confided to his closest friends that he knew what the book held – except for one single sign. Many years later it was thought that the sign Erik claimed not to know was the very sign that would send a man’s soul to hell.

The following tales are of Erik’s days as priest Erik, a man of the church, and Sira Erik and his magic ways.

1. The Beggar Woman

As was often the case, two men came to Priest Erik and asked him to teach them sorcery. He answered that he knew nothing of sorcery, but that they were welcome to stay the night by him. They accepted the invitation with thanks.

In the morning, Erik invited his guests to ride about the fields of his farm for enjoyment. When they had gone a short way from the farm, they met an old woman. She had a child at her breast and asked Erik for a few alms.

Erik was annoyed by her begging and said that he would not give her a single penny. The woman said that she was a poor widow and very needy, then began crying in a God forsaken way. But Erik was more annoyed by her than before and said that he had had enough of listening to the continual crying of beggars and said, “It would be best if you tramps were murdered!” This and more Erik said to her, but she begged even more fervently.

Finally, Erik said to the men, “You must murder the old woman if you want me to teach you sorcery!” One guest answered, “Never did I think,

Erik, that you were such a godless person, and never would I do such a misdeed no matter what reward you offered me."

"I don't believe that I would let this matter chase me away from Sira Erik," said the second guest. "I'm willing to murder the old woman. The old tramp hasn't earned any better than to be murdered. Such trash should be thankful if they lose their lives."

So Erik chased the second man away, saying that no one could bring him to teach such hard-hearted people anything. The first man, on the other hand, he took into his tutelage. For Erik had called up a specter for them to test them. In reality, there was no old woman.

2. The Face in the Mound

A young man once asked Sira Erik for permission to accompany him on a Sunday afternoon when he left the farm. For a long time, the priest declined because he felt there would be little value in it for the young man. But each week, the young man became more insistent. Finally, Erik promised occasionally to take the young man with him.

So at a later occasion, Erik took the young man along. The weather was fair and pleasant. They went out into a field where they came to a mound. The priest struck the mound with a staff, and the mound opened up and an elderly woman came out to them. She greeted Erik very confidentially and invited them to come in.

The two men accepted the invitation and entered into a bathing hall where many people were seated around the room. Erik and his companion seated themselves on one side of the door, with the priest sitting nearer the center. No one spoke a word, and this struck the young man as very strange.

The women then left the hall, but then after a while came back. They carried a knife and a tub, and went to the man who sat at the outermost seat on the opposite side of the door. They grabbed him, laid him next to the tub, butchered him like a sheep and then put him in the tub.

The women then went to the next and then the others, one after the other, down the whole row, and each one butchered in the same way. No one tried to defend him or herself, and all of them sat quietly without saying a word.

Erik showed no sign of surprise at this behavior, but his companion was extremely upset by it. He saw that the women had no intention of stopping

until everyone had been cut in half. When they came to Sira Erik, the grabbed him and cut him just as they had the others.

The young man screamed loudly and making himself scarce, he ran to the door and out of the hall. He ran home to the farm and thanked God for his speedy legs. But as he came to the house entrance, he saw Priest Erik standing in the door leaning with his hand against the upper doorpost. He smiled when he saw the young man and said, “Why are you running so fast, my friend?”

The young man had no idea what to say, and now he was ashamed when he realized that the priest had played a trick of the eye on him. Erik then said, “I thought so, my friend, that you would not withstand seeing that!”

3. The Horse Theft

Sira Erik had instructed the shepherds as well as the other boys in Selvog to avoid taking his riding horses without his permission. He threatened that if they did it would not go well for them, and so the shepherds did as he asked and had nothing to do with his riding horses.

However, two young boys did not heed his prohibition. But hardly had they mounted to the backs of the horses than the mounts raced straightaway to Vogsosar without the boys being able to gain control of them. They tried to lower themselves down since they could not bring the horses to stop. But that wasn’t possible because they found their trousers had grown fast to the horses’ backs.

“That doesn’t work,” said one of the boys, “we have to get down from the horses or we’ll fall into the hands of Master Erik, and no one would want to be in our skins.” So he took out a knife and cut the crotch from his trousers, and so was able to get away from the horse.

But the other young man was either not clever enough to do the same, or wished not to ruin his trousers. So the horses ran home to Vogsosar—one with the howling boy aboard and the other with pieces of trousers on its back. When they arrived at the farm, the priest was standing outside. He pulled the trouser remnants from the one horse’s back and then said to the boy on the other horse, “You see, it’s not good to steal horses from Priest Erik in Vogsosar. Now get down and never again take my horse without asking my permission. Your comrade was cleverer than you were. He

earned the right to be taught the alphabet; he will make something of himself.

Some time later, the cleverer boy came to the priest, who showed him the cloth remnants and asked him if he recognized them. The boy would not let the question upset him, and instead told the priest what had happened. The priest laughed and instructed the boy to come to him.

This request was gladly accepted by the boy, who remained a long time at the priest's house and became very obedient. People say that the priest taught him much of the old ways.

4. Erik and the Farmer

While Erik was the priest in Vogsosar, there lived in his congregation a farmer who never attended church and on holidays would always row out to fish just to anger the priest, even if the weather was not the best.

One day, the priest had to attend church to hold a service. The farmer arranged things so that he was just putting on his leather trousers when the priest walked by. The priest asked the farmer if he would attend the service if the priest asked him to do so. The farmer answered no and then began to put on his leather pants.

The priest left, held the services and then went home after church on the same way as he had come. He again met the farmer, who was standing in the same place and was still only about to put only one leg in the trousers. The priest said that he probably had a good catch since he was already back on land.

But the man was very embarrassed as he told what had happened: that he had been forced to sit where he was since they parted earlier. He asked the priest to release him. The priest said, "If you already find that the devil is too strong for you now, how will it be later?"

The priest then ordered the devil to let the farmer go free. The farmer was freed, and from that day on he always visited the church.

5. Erik and the Old Woman

Priest Erik once wanted to ride eastward over Thjod Brook. On his ride with a companion, he came to Oerebakke and went into the store to refill his flask (he was known to enjoy a drink now and then).

As he was about to enter the store, he saw two old women sitting outside. One of them asked the other who that was going in, to which the other answered, “Don’t you know the Horror of Vogsosar? He’s easy to recognize.” With that, their talk stopped. Erik continued on his ride.

When he came to Hraun Brook, his companion saw an old woman following them and so he asked the priest to wait a while. But Erik said that he didn’t have the time, so they rode on somewhat rapidly until they came to the Thjod Brook ferry at Sandholar where they dismounted. The old woman came running after, having followed them all the way from Oerebakke, half dead from exhaustion and weakness and without her outer cloak.

Erik approached the old woman and said, “Turn around, my dear, since you have now seen the ‘Horror from Vogsosar’, and avoid insulting respectable people in the future.”

With that, the old woman turned around. The priest said to his companion that he let the old woman run after them to teach her not to curse or make fun of respectable people.

6. Erik and the Bishop

The bishop of Skálholt heard so many tales of magic about priest Erik that he finally had enough, and he decided to defrock him. For this reason, one winter he sent eighteen schoolboys to Erik with the task of taking his frock. So on a fair day they set out with much about to occur.

One morning Priest Erik got up very early and went out in front of his house. He came in again, sighing and groaning. He forbade his farmboys from letting the livestock out of the stall because he did not like the looks of the weather, so they promised to do as he told them. Soon thereafter, a terrible storm arose with rain and blowing snow such that one could barely stand or even go outside.

After noontime, there came a knock at the door. It was one of the students. They had become separated from each other in the blizzard, but all of them reached Vogsosar individually and the day was over before they all were again together.

Erik welcomed them and gave them every possible courtesy, and they all became very fond of him. This made it difficult for them to agree on carrying out their task given them by the bishop of taking his frock. So they

returned unsuccessfully back home where they told the bishop what had occurred. The bishop was very little pleased and said that he would visit Erik himself and see if his intentions met a similar bad end.

Winter then passed and summer began. The bishop set off, and many of his students accompanied him. He came to Vogsosar where he pitched a tent outside the wall of the farm. It was a weekday, so the bishop decided to wait for Sunday to defrock Erik. He asked his people to avoid accepting any kind of gift from Erik.

He then went to the house and asked to see the priest. Erik received the bishop joyfully, and was unusually happy. The bishop asked to visit the church, and Erik showed it to him. The bishop was amazed at the good condition and order of everything he found there.

While the bishop was in the church, one of the students came for fire and met Erik. The priest welcomed him cordially, took out a wine bottle that he carried with him and offered the student a drink. The student refused the drink because, he said, the bishop had strictly forbidden accepting anything.

But Erik implored eagerly for the student to take a drink, saying that he could certainly accept. The student relented and so took a gulp from the bottle. To him, it seemed as though he had never before tasted such a fiery wine. So he asked the priest for the bottle so he could let the bishop refresh himself with the tasty wine. Erik was quite ready to give it to him.

The student returned with the wine to the tent. At midday vespers, the student poured the wine in the bishop’s glass without telling him where the outstanding drink was from. The bishop emptied the glass, finding that he liked it very much. While he drank, his thoughts about Erik changed. After the meal, the bishop went to Erik’s house, stayed a week with him and lived like a prince in a castle.

The bishop then returned homeward, and nothing came of the plan to defrock Erik.

7. How Erik Brought Back the Farmer’s Wife

A young and able farmer on the Westman Islands who had recently married, lost his wife. This happened when, as was her practice, she got up early one morning to light the fire while the farmer still slept.

This time, however, she was away longer than usual and the farmer became bored. So he got up to go and find her. But her found her nowhere on the farm. So he went from house to house asking after her, but no one had seen her.

On this day, just as one many that followed, many of the people went about looking for her. But nowhere was she to be found. The farmer took her disappearance so to heart that he went to bed but would niether sleep nor eat.This, he did for such a long, long time, and the longer he remained in bed the sicker he became.

What agonized him most was that he did not know the manner of his wife's death – something he was sure had happened and presuming it most likely that she had drown in the ocean. Everyone believed that the farmer would waste away and die, since in spite of all possible attempts to console him, he became steadily worse.

Then one day a friend came to him and said, "Won't you at least try to get up if I give you some advice that could possibly lead to your learning what became of your wife?"

"I would certainly try if I only could," replied the farmer.

The friend said, “Pull yourself together, get up and leave your bed and eat something. Then go to Selvog on the mainland and to Priest Erik in Vogsosar, Ask him to try to find your wife.”

This advice greatly strengthened the farmer. He dressed, ate and slowly recovered so that he felt able to go to the mainland. Nothing is told of his trip until he came to Vogsosar. Erik was standing in front of his house and welcomed the farmer, asking about his concern. The farmer told what had happened.

Erik said, “I do not know what happened to your wife, but if you wish you can remain here for a few days and we can see what can be done.” The farmer gratefully accepted the invitation.

After two or three days, Erik had two grey horses brought to the house. One was a handsome horse, but the other was ugly and thin. Erik had the second horse saddled for himself, while the first horse was saddled for the farmer. The Erik said, “Now we will ride out onto the sand.”

The farmer said, “Don’t mount that dry bag of bones! He can’t carry you.” But Erik acted as though he had not heard what the farmer had said. They mounted and rode away in a storm and heavy rain.

As they came outside the opening to the bay, the skinny horse began to move more strongly, soon leaving the other one behind. The farmer rode behind as quickly as he could, but soon Erik had disappeared. Still, the farmer rode farther until he came to Gedeli and to the stones known as Syssel Rocks that form the border between Arnessyssel and Gullbringesyssel.

There, he found Erik had already arrived. He had laid a large book on the largest stone, and the farmer saw that not one drop fell on the open book and not one page moved although it poured rain and stormed fearfully. Erik then walked toward the sun and around the stone, muttering something between his teeth and then saying to the farmer, “Now, take notice if you can see your wife.”

A crowd of people came to the stone, and the farmer went through the group from one to the other, but did not see his wife. Then Erik spoke to the people: “Go then in peace, and have thanks for coming!”

Erik then turned some of the pages in the book, and it happened as before. He then tried a third time and again everything was as before. When this last group had disappeared Erik said, “Was she not in any of the groups?” When the farmer answered no, Erik flushed and said, “I am losing my patience, my good man. I have invited all of the huldre folk here that live on the earth, in the earth and in water of whom I remember.” With that, he took out a small book from his breast pocket, looked inside and said, “There is still the married couple from Höieli.”

He laid the little book on the large one, went against the sun around the stone and muttered as before. Suddenly, the couple appeared carrying a small house of glass between them. In the little house, the farmer recognized his wife. Erik spoke to the couple as follows: “You behaved poorly by taking this woman from her husband. Leave now, and shame on you for this deed. And do not let me again see that you have done such a deed again.”

The couple disappeared immediately, and Erik smashed the little glass house, took the woman and the books and mounted his horse with

everything. The farmer then said, “Let me take my wife with me on my horse, because your horse certainly cannot carry you both.” But Erik said that he would be alright, then rode away and soon disappeared between the lava rocks.

The farmer rode on to the east until he came to Vogsosar where Erik had already arrived. That night Erik let the woman sleep in his bed while he laid in front of her on the bed’s edge. The next morning, the farmer prepared to return home. Erik said, “It isn’t advisable to leave your wife with you. I will bring her home myself.” The farmer thanked him.

The priest mounted the boney horse, set the wife in front of him and rode away. The farmer rode behind them but saw nothing of Erik until he came to the Westman Islands, where he found Erik and his wife. The following nights, the farmer went to bed with his wife while Erik kept watch over them for three nights. He then said, “It isn’t certain if each of us found pleasure keeping watch these last nights, particularly the last night.”

From that night, on, the wife had nothing more to fear. While Erik kept watch over the woman at night, each morning he gave her a drink so that she regained her memory again, which she had lost completely. Then Erik returned home but not before receiving valuable gifts from the farmer.

8. How Erik Rescued the Farmer’s Wife from the Huldre Folk

A farmer from the peninsula of Njarđvik who was a good friend of Erik came from the south in early spring after the fishing season to Priest Erik. He was on horseback because he had kept his horse with him through the winter.

When he arrived in Vogsosar, Erik was standing in front of his house and so welcomed the farmer, asking, “Did you have a good ride, my friend?” The farmer answered no because the horse was too lean and poorly shod, he said. Erik then told him, “You must hurry to return home, because your wife is on her deathbed.” The farmer answered, “Yes, but what can I do?”

Erik went to the horse, looked at the horseshoes, then spit under the hooves and said, “Mount your horse and ride as fast as you can, because it is now possible that the shoes last long enough. When you arrive home and enter the yard, you will hear your wife’s cries from outside. Hurry inside, but do not greet her; instead, say curtly, 'Erik of Vogsosar wants to speak with you,’ and then see what happens.”

The farmer thanked him for the advice, and rode away. The horse ran away more quickly with him than he could have wished, and so he arrived home on that same day. When he entered the yard, he heard the cries of his wife. He behaved just as Erik had advised him. His wife then was so changed that within an hour she was totally well.

At the same time on that evening there was a hard knocking at the door at Vogsosar. Erik went to open the door, stayed outside a short while and then came inside again. When asked who it was at the door. He answered, “Oh, just someone who wished to discuss something with me.”

When the farmer went to the fishing ground the next time, he rewarded the help Erik had given him richly.

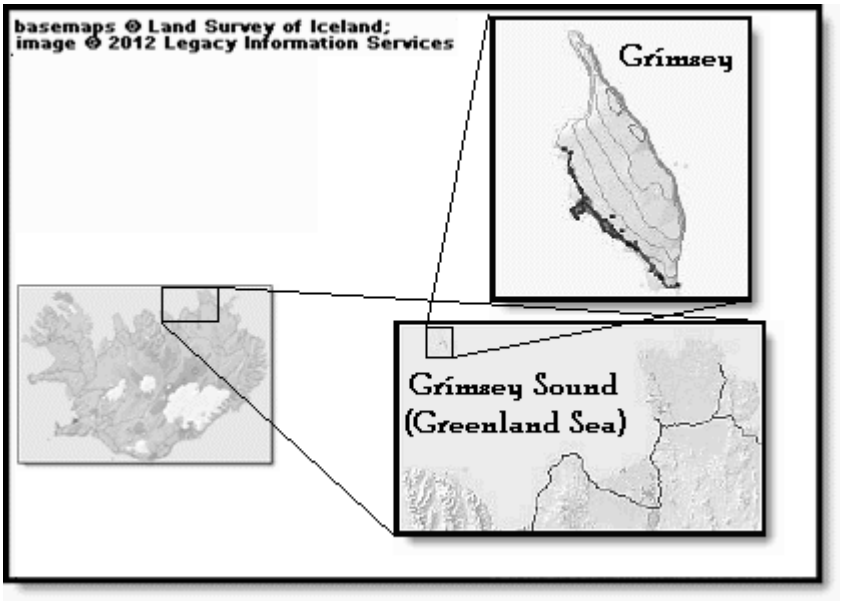
9. Priest Erik’s Death

When Erik felt that his death was approaching, he selected the pallbearers who would carry his body. He asked that when his was carried to the church, a heavy hailstorm would occur. But he said that the coffin should not be set down for any reason after it is picked up until it is taken into the church.

The hailstorm would then stop and two birds would be seen flying over the church, a white one and a black one, and they would be fighting each other bitterly. He asked that if the white bird wins and lands on the roof ridge, he wished to be buried in the churchyard. But if the black bird wins and lands on the church, he should be buried outside the churchyard. With that, Erik died.

Everything happened as Erik had predicted. The hail shower clattered down and the birds fought with each other. But the white bird won over the black one, and Erik was given a grave inside the churchyard.

Chapter 44. The Man from Grimsey and the Bear



It happened once on the island of Grimsey that the winter fires went out and no fires could be lit on any of the farms.

The weather was quiet, but the frost was so great that the Grimsey Sound was frozen over and the people believed that they could travel on the ice. So the residents of Grimsey decided to send a people to the mainland to obtain fire, choosing three of the island's most competent men.

Early in the morning on a day with clear weather, they set out for the mainland. A number of residents accompanied them onto the ice, wished them a good trip and that they soon would return home.

No more is known of the wanderers' trip until they were in the middle of the sound where they encountered a channel of open water so long that they could not see the end, and so wide that while two of them could barely jump over it, the third man did not feel capable of mak¬ing the jump. So the other two advised the third man to return to the island, and then continued their trek.

But the third man remained on the channel's edge, watching the other two as they traveled on. He did not wish to return in failure, and so he

decided to travel the channel edge until he could find a narrower point to cross.

As the day went on the weather became grey, and a rain storm approached from the south. The ice then broke away and the result was that the man was afloat on an ice floe that began drifting out to sea. In the evening, the floe struck against a large iceberg and the man climbed onto it.

Here, close nearby, he found a bear lying on top of its cub. The man was fearful and hungry, and feared for his life. When the bear noticed the man he just watched him for a while, and then stood up and came toward the man. Circling around the man, the bear seemed to give the man a sign that he should go to where the cub was lying.

The man did so, but with great fear. As he lay down next to the cub, the bear laid down next to them both. The bear then pulled the man and the cub to her belly and pushed his head against her to nurse from her teat.

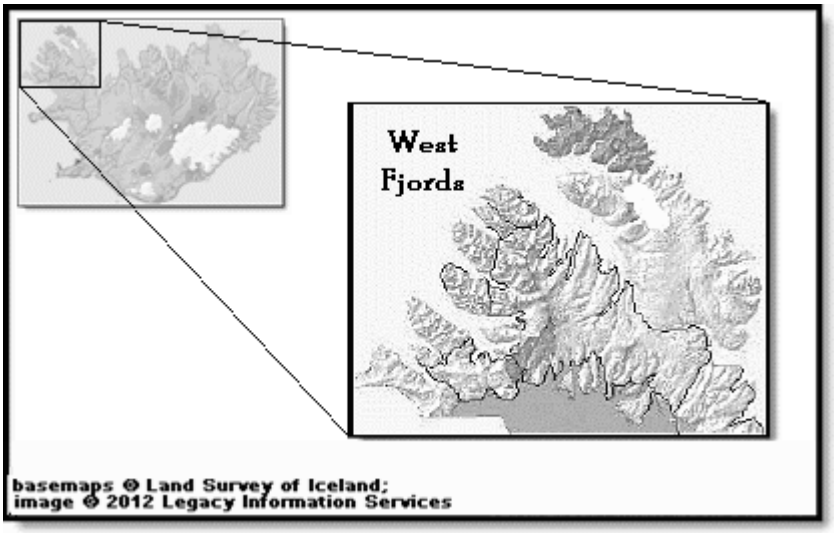
The night passed and on the next day, the bear got up, moved away from the ice den and then motioned with its huge paw for the man to follow. When the man came to the bear, it lay down at his feet and gave a sign for him to climb up on its back. When he had climbed on the bear’s back, the bear stood up, rocked and shook itself until the man fell off. This seemed to satisfy the bear for now, but the man wondered what was happening.

Three days passed; the man lay in the bears’ ice den and nursed the mother bear’s milk. And each morning the bear again signaled the man to climb up and sit on her back, but then she shook until he could no longer hold on. But on the fourth morning, the man was able to hold tight no matter how much it shook. That evening, the bear went down off the ice and with the man on its back and leaving its cub behind it swam to Grimsey Island.

When the man was again on land, he went up onto the island and then gave the bear a sign that it should follow him. He went ahead to his home where he immediately milked the best cow in the stall, drinking as much fresh milk as he could. He then led the bear to his sheep pen where he took out and slaughtered the two best sheep from his herd. Binding the sheep together by the horns, he then laid them across the mother bear’s back. The bear then returned to the sea and swam back to its cub.

Now there was much happiness on Grimsey, because while the residents watched the bear in astonishment, they also saw a boat coming from the mainland sailing on a good wind. At this, they saw the two other wanderers returning with fire.

Chapter 45. The Bear that Wrestled with The Barrel



In the West Fjords, there was somewhere a farm below a steep mountain where a wealthy farmer once lived. High up on the highest ridge of the mountain the farmer had a large hut where he kept fish and other things. Leading from the farm was a straight path up the moun¬tain that passed by close to the hut. The path was framed on both sides by rows of large stones, but the path itself, though steep, was quite even under foot.

One day, the farmer noticed that when it became dark in the evening that usually a bear came up the straight path to the hut and took his fish, causing the farmer much damage. So the farmer thought of a trick to discourage the bear from eating his fish.

He had a very large barrel made that filled the whole path if rolled down the hill. He then filled the barrel with stones and sealed the end solid and tight. He left the barrel sitting at the mountaintop where the path began, and waited in his hut one evening until the bear came up the path toward the hut.

The bear appeared at the usual time and suspecting nothing out of sorts began its way up the mountain path. When it was almost at the top, the farmer rolled the barrel down to meet the bear.

The bear was unable to go any further. The barrel rolled hurriedly, appearing quite impatient to get down the mountain. The bear, pinned in by the narrow path and stone walls, was unable to jump over the barrel and dared not turn around since it would have had the barrel right on its heels. So it tried with all its strength to stop the barrel from rolling right over its head.

As a result, the bear wrestled with the barrel the whole night, gradually losing the battle until both had reached the bottom of the path and level ground. By this time, the bear was close to collapsing from exhaustion and could only slink away while regarding the barrel from the corner of its eye.

The laughter trailed after the poor bear, and from that time on the farmer had no problem with his goods in the hut.

Chapter 46. How the Seal Came to Be

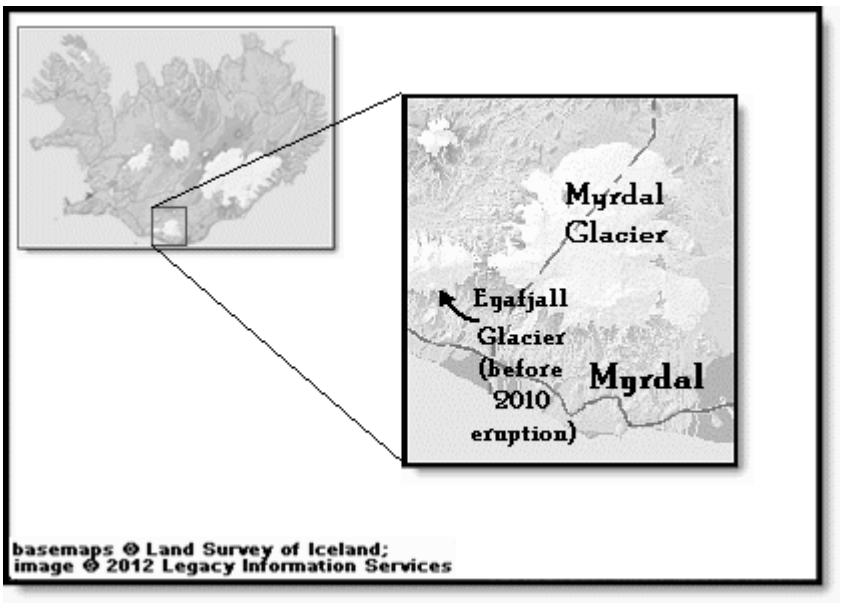
Over the origin of the seal, it is told that when Egypt's pharaoh chased Moses and the Jews across the Red Sea and so drown along with his army as is told in the bible, the pharaoh and all of his men became seals. This is the reason that the skeleton of the seal resembles that of man so greatly.

Since that time, seals live as a family at the bottom of the sea but have kept the spirit, nature and the characteristics of man beneath their fur. And every St. John's Day (24) (or for some, on Three Kings' Day (25)) it is told how seals escape their skins and go on land where they take on the form of men and sing and dance as any other people.

24. Translator's note: St. John's Day is near or on the summer solstice of June 23.

25. Translator's note: Three King's Day is said to be the day when the kings visited Jesus in Bethlehem, and is celebrated by Catholics on January 6. This day is also called the Epiphany, culminating the 12 days of Christmas.

Chapter 47. The Sealskin



One morning before the other people were awake a farmer from Myrdal in the east went past a cliff and came to the entrance to a cave. Here, he heard the noise coming from inside as though people were singing and dancing. Outside of the cave, he saw many sealskins.

Taking one of the skins, he brought it home and locked it in a chest. Later during the day, he again passed by the cave entrance where he saw a pretty young girl who was completely naked and was crying sorrowfully. She was the seal to whom the sealskin belonged that he had taken earlier. The man gave the girl clothes, consoled her and then took her home with him.

The man became very fond of the girl, but her disposition did not please the other people. At times, she just sat and looked out to sea. Still, after a time the man took the girl as his wife. They got on well together and had many children. The farmer kept the sealskin hidden under lock and key in his chest and always carried the key regardless of where he went.

Some say that after many years had passed, he was sailing out to the fishing grounds but forgot the key at home beneath his pillow. Others say that the farmer had gone with his people to church at Christmas, but that his wife was ill and was unable to go with them. When the farmer changed his

work clothes for church, he forgot to take the key from the pocket. When he returned home, the chest was open and his wife and the sealskin were gone. She had found the key, and from curiosity she searched the chest and found the sealskin. Unable to resist the temptation and longer, she bid her children goodbye, crawled into the skin and threw herself into the sea.

But before she jumped into the ocean, she is to have said:

“I want to go, but then I don’t —

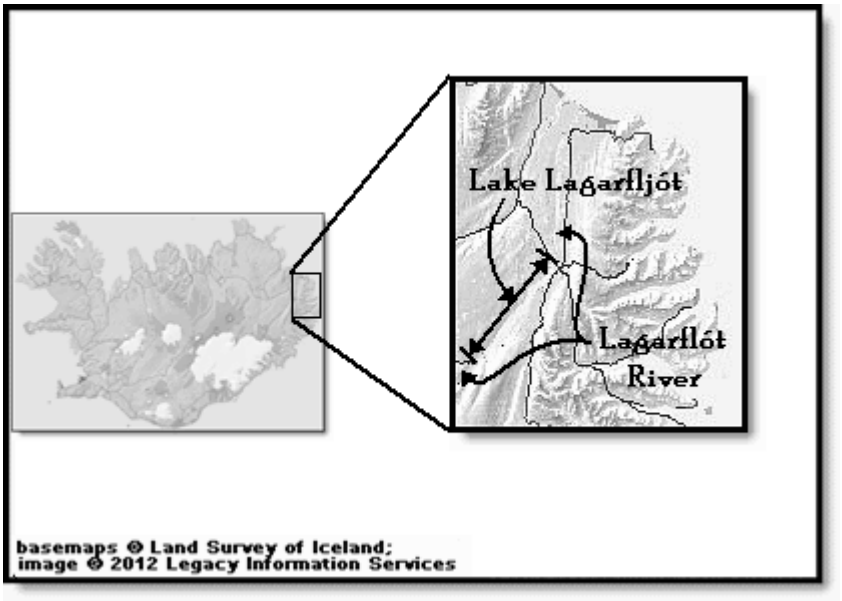
Seven children have I beneath the swell

Seven children have I here as well.”

It is said that the farmer was heartbroken. When he later sailed out again to fish, a seal often swam around his boat and it seemed to him as though tears were in its eyes. From that time on, he always had a good catch and good fortune sought out his harbor.

And when their children went to the beach, a seal swam in the sea as though accompanying them whether they were on land or along the beach and it threw colorful fish and large mussels to them. But their mother never returned.

Chapter 48. The Lindworm in the Lagarfljót



Translator's note: see endnote 26 for more on the lindworm.

It happened once in the old days that a woman lived on a farm near the Lagarfljót River. She had a grown daughter to whom she once gave a jeweled golden ring.

The daughter asked her, "How can I make the best use of this gold, mother?"

"Lay it beneath a lindworm," replied her mother.

So the daughter took the ring and placed it under a small lindworm. She then placed them together in her clothing chest.

When she later looked in the chest, the lindworm had become so large that the chest was bulging and threatened to come apart. This frightened the girl so much that she took the chest with everything in it and threw it into the river.

A long time passed, and people began to see the lindworm in the river. It was known to cause harm to both man and beast when they tried to cross the river. At times, it stretched itself onto the riverbanks and spewed poison in a most horrible way. That seemed to cause great harm, and no one knew what to do.

The people sought refuge from two Finlanders. They were to kill the lindworm and recover the gold. They jumped into the river, and soon returned to the surface. They said that they were dealing with a great power and that it would not be easy to kill the lindworm and recover the gold. They also said that beneath the gold at the bottom was another lindworm, and it was much worse than the first one.

They then bound the lindworm with two strands of yarn: one around its stomach and the other around the tail. From that time on, the lindworm is unable to harm either man or beast.

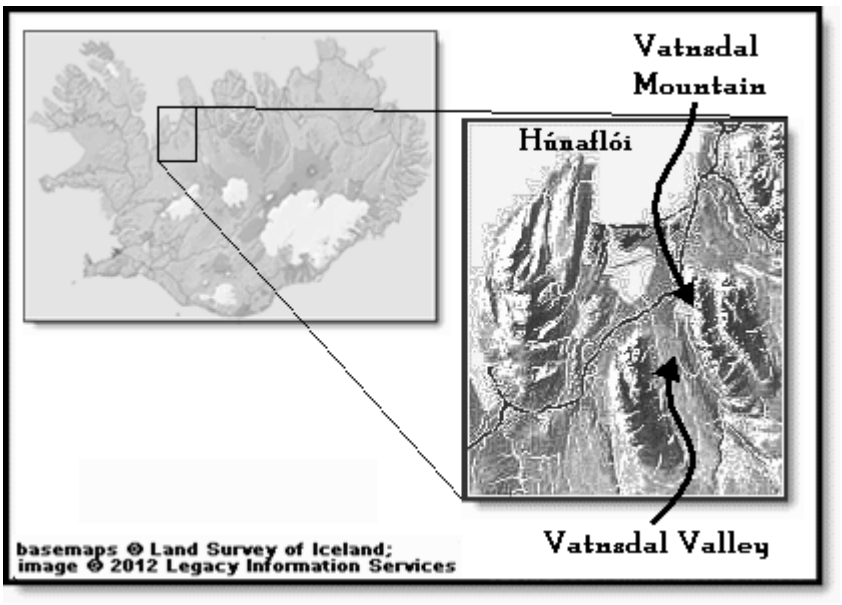
But occasionally it occurs that a hump appears on the dragon's back above the surface. When this is seen, people strongly believe that it is an omen that bad things will happen; for example, famine for the people or poor fodder for the livestock(27).

And there are those who do not believe in the dragon and say that not long ago a priest crossed the river at the place where the dragon was to have laid. At least, that is what they say to prove that the dragon is not there.

26. Translator's note: The legend of a Loch Ness-like serpent (or "worm") in Lagarfljót Lake, also known as Lake Logurinn, on the Lagarfljót River has endured for centuries. In modern Icelandic it is the "Lagar¬fljótsormur". This derives from the Old Norse word "linnormr" and means either a mythical snake or dragon. Our translation uses the modern equivalent, lindworm.

27. Other versions of the story say that the appearance of a hump is a good omen.

Chapter 49. The Thankful Raven



It is told that a landslide on Vatnsdal Mountain destroyed some farms in Vatnsdal in the Northlands. One of the farms was called Guldberastad. The daughter of the farmer at Guldberastad had the habit of sharing her meals with a raven that lived at the farm.

Once when she tried, as she often did, to give the food to the bird through the window. But it would not take it. The girl wondered about this and so took the food outside. The raven came to her but still would not take the food even though it showed the whole time that it had a hearty appetite.

The girl followed the raven onto the nearby field, a short way from the house. She had hardly gotten into the field when she heard a strong rumble coming from the mountain above. Suddenly, a landslide came down from the mountain, rushing past the girl and the raven on either side but without touching the place where they were. The landslide rushed over the house, destroying it and everything in it – alive or not.

In this way, the raven rewarded the farmer’s daughter for the food that she had given it. But the reason why the landslide did not touch the place where the raven and the girl were standing was that Bishop Gudmund the Holy had once pitched his tent on this very place while on a trip through the area. Before he broke camp and left, he blessed the tent site, as he was

known often to do, and so it was that neither the girl nor the bird were affected by the tragedy.

Chapter 50. Asmund and Signe

There once lived a king in his kingdom. He was married and had by his wife two children: a son and a daughter. The son’s name was Asmund and the daughter’s was Signe.

They were the most promising children anyone of that time ever knew, and they were raised in every art of that time that royal children should know. They grew up at home by their father and their every wish was fulfilled.

The king gave his son Asmund two huge oak trees that stood in the forest, and Asmund had great pleasure in hollowing out the branches and make little rooms in them. Signe often followed him, and she was amazed at the trees and wished to own them with her brother. He granted her wish, and she took all manner of precious stones and other treasures that her mother had given her into the trees.

Then one day, their father the king left for war. While he was away, the queen became sick and died. The children went out into the forest and into the oak trees after first preparing themselves with enough food for a year.

It must now be told that in another land a king reigned who had a son named Ring. Ring was told of the Signe’s great beauty and decided that he would court her. His father gave him a ship for the trip and with favorable winds he came to the land where Signe lived.

When Ring was going to the king’s hall, he met a woman along the way who was so beautiful that he believed he had never seen her equal. He asked her name, but she replied that she was the king’s daughter Sigrid. He asked her why she was going about alone and she answered that she did so in mourning for her mother’s death and because her father was not at home.

Ring said that she is who he sought and that he could tell her now that he had come to ask for her hand. She listened courteously to his speech of courtship, but asked him to go back to his ship because she wanted to return to the forest.

She then returned to the oak trees in her normal form as a huldre giantess. She tore the trees out by the roots and while carrying one on her back and the other on her breast she carried them to the sea and waded with them to the ship. Here, she again regained her beautiful form as before and

told the king’s son that she had brought her belongings on board and that nothing of hers remained.

They then said back to his home where his parents and sister received them with great joy. He gave his fiancé a beautiful chamber and planted the two oak trees outside her window.

After a half month, he came to her and said that within two weeks he wished to marry her. He gave her precious cloth for wedding clothes for them both. Hardly had he left again when she threw the cloth on the floor, raced about in a great frenzy and then changed completely, becoming the most horrible of witches.

She cried that she had no idea what to do with such finery. She had never done anything else but eat human flesh and break horses’ bones. She continued with her tantrum of destruction and said that she was about to die of hunger because her brother Ironhead(28) never came with the coffins as he had promised.

Just then, the floor of the room opened and out climbed a giant with a monstrous coffin in his arms filled with the men’s’ stomachs. They then both eating from it voraciously, but soon her giant brother left the same way he had come without leaving a trace on the floor. When she again sat down, she ranted worse than before while pulling at the precious cloth and trying to tear it apart.

In the meantime, the king’s children who were in the oak trees saw all that had happened. So Asmund asked Signe to leave her tree and try to snatch the precious cloth so that they would not have to listen to the witch’s antics both day and night. Signe granted his wish, snatched the cloth and then sewed the clothes as good as she could in six days, taking them back and throwing them on the table.

The witch was very pleased with this. The king’s son came to her and received the clothing from her hand, amazed at her ability. They then parted in great friendliness. The witch then went back to her old ways just as before until her brother Ironhead again came.

When Asmund saw these outrageous actions, he went to the king’s son and asked him to come and watch the antics playing out in the chambers of the newly arrived king’s daughter. The king’s son was horrified as he heard of the actions of his bride-to-be.

They both went to her chamber and hid behind the wall tapestries from where they could spy on her. She continued to race about, saying to her brother Ironhead when he came, “Once I’m married to the king’s son, I will live better than now. Then, I’ll murder the whole crowd in the hall there and then move in here with my whole tribe. Then the trolls will celebrate me and my new husband.”

The king’s son became so very angry when he heard this that he started the house on fire, burning it down to just ashes. Asmund then told him of the oak trees and the king’s son was quite pleased over Signe’s beauty as well as what the trees held. He courted Asmund’s sister Signe and Asmund did the same of Ring’s sister, and soon after they were all wed. Asmund then returned home to his father. Later, the two took over the two kingdoms from their fathers, reigning into their old age. And that ends this tale.

28. Translator’s note: Ironhead, or German “Eisenkopf”, appears in various tales as a manifestation of the devil. A short adaptation of an original and more involved Hungarian folktale, “Eisenkopf”, by the prolific Andrew Lang can be read by entering the URL http://goo.gl/4aSOX.

Chapter 51. The Two Ash Trees

It is told that in the old days that a pair of siblings from a good family lived in the Westman Islands. It happened then that the daughter became pregnant in her parents' home. Because the two siblings loved each other dearly, ugly rumors began to spread that the girl's brother was the father of the child that she was expecting. The rumor finally also reached the ears of the islands' lawmakers, and so they began to investigate the matter.

It was of no purpose that the brother denied being guilty of this crime or that he swore by all that was holy that he was not at fault, nor that his sister said he was innocent and named another man who had left the islands as the father. In those days, the crime was one of family shame here in the land and called for a sharp penalty even when the chiefs had nothing more than an unproven suspicion. The penalty was the sentence of death, and in this case, that is what was pronounced. So the two siblings were sentenced to death, and the sentence was carried out.

It is said that at the gallows they pleaded in God's name in tears that their innocence be proven even though no one believed them while they were alive. They also begged their parents to let them be buried together in a common grave in the churchyard. Then, they were executed.

With much trouble and possibly only through a large donation to the church and the priests, as was often necessary in those days, the parents saw to it that their children were buried in the churchyard. But they were not placed in the same grave; instead, one was buried on the south side of the church and the other on the north side.

As time passed, the people discovered that from each of their graves a small ash tree was springing up. These saplings developed normally and became ever larger until finally their branches met over the roof beam of the church. The people believed that by letting the ash trees grow from their graves without, as far as anyone knew, their being planted by anyone's hand, God wanted to prove the innocence of the two siblings to the living.

The matter of the trees meeting over the peak of the roof and the way their leaves and branches had woven together seemed to show the innocent and loving life together that had reigned between the siblings in their earthly lives, and it also demonstrated their yearning after death to be buried in the same grave.

The ash trees stood and grew for a long time until into the early 17th century when the Turkish dogs(29) overran the islands, taking both goods and people and carried out other atrocities, as is well known. According to the story, one of the violent acts of the Turks was that they cut down the two ash trees in the cemetery and threatened to return to the islands and to ravage and rob everything if the trees ever grew again as large as they were then.

No one knows if the trees regrew again, and it was seen as the grace of God that they hadn't or the Turks would certainly have kept their word.

29.Translator's note: This is a mistaken attribution of the "Turkish abductions" that occurred during July, 1627 in the Westman Islands, to Turks. The raids were apparently carried out by Barbary pirates from Algiers and not Turkey. Stories vary widely about the raids and the taking of Icelanders as slaves. Their reputation for ferocity may in part stem from an attack by North African Barbary privateers, specifically the Dutch Muslim convert Jan Janszoon, "the blonde Arab", on Reykjavik and the Westlands in 1627 during which between 200 and 400 Icelanders were reported as captured and sold into slavery in Africa. King Christian freed one captive, the woman Gudrid Simonardottir, who returned to Iceland ten years later where she was derisively labeled Gudda the Turk ("Turk" was a common misnomer used in those times for darker people of the Mediterranean area). An account written in 1643 by Bjórn Jónsson and others and published in 1866 called "The Turkish (sic) Raid Saga" (first in Turkish followed by English) is availablein PDF format. Enter the URL http://goo.gl/USv0B.

Chapter 52. The Glowing Key

A sheep thief in a remote part of Iceland sat down with a plump leg of mutton (others say it was a mutton shoulder) in his hand that he had stolen with the intention of eating it in peace and quiet.

The full moon shone clearly with not a cloud in the sky. While holding his knife with a piece of the meat on its tip, the thief reached toward the moon and then spoke coarse words:

“Fat is here,
Come to me
Savour this fine taste!”

A voice then answered him from the heavens:

“Watch out, thief!,
Key, you fly,
Until you find that face!”

Suddenly, a glowing hot key fell down from the heavens and struck the thief on the cheek, branding the thief and leaving him with a scar that he carried for the rest of his life.

Chapter 53. What Happened to Jon’s Soul

There once lived a man and his wife. The man was unsociable and not liked, and he was lazy and of little use at home. His wife, however, was rarely satisfied. She often bawled him out, telling him that he was good for nothing else except to waste whatever they had saved.

She was an attentive woman and used every trick to obtain the necessities, but to accept what she could not change. But while there were things that they could not agree on, she was good to her old man and tried to see that he lacked for nothing.

And so things went for a long time until he became very ill. The woman cared for him, and when his strength waned, she realized that he was poorly prepared for death and that it was not without question if he would be allowed into heaven.

So she thought to herself that it might be advisable to try to bring the soul of her man back onto the right path. She took a leather pouch and held it in front of his nostrils. When he breathed out his soul she caught it in the pouch and hurriedly tied shut the opening.

Then, with the pouch wrapped in her skirt, she went to heaven where she knocked on heaven’s gate. St. Peter came to the gate and asked the purpose of her visit. “Good day,” she said, “I have come here with the soul of my man Jon. You certainly have heard of him, and I want to ask you to please let him slip in to heaven.”

“Oh,” said St. Peter, “I’m sorry, but I can’t do that. I have certainly heard talk of your Jon, but never anything good.” The old woman said, “I would never have believe, Peter, that you were so hardhearted. You must have forgotten how it was once with you when you lied to your lord and master.”

With that, St. Peter went back inside and closed the gate. The old woman remained outside, sighing. When a short time had passed, she knocked again and this time St. Paul came out. She greeted him and asked who he was, and he told her his name. She then asked him to attend to the soul of her man Jon. But St. Paul said that he wanted nothing to do with Jon, and that he had earned no mercy.

The old woman reacted with venom, saying, “That suits you well, Paul! To my thinking, you probably are more entitled to mercy, because earlier of

the way you persecuted good people and God himself (30)! It is probably best that I stop asking for your help." With that, St. Paul quickly closed the door.

When the old woman knocked once more, the Virgin Mary answered. "Good day, dear Virgin," said the old woman. "It is my hope that you allow my man Jon to com in, even if Peter and Paul do not." "Sorry, but I cannot do that, my dear," answered Mary. "Your Jon is too much of a good-for-nothing."

"I will not argue that with you," said the woman, "but I believed that you knew that others were as weak as you were – or don't you any longer recall that you had a child whose father you could not name?" Mary wished to hear no more and hurriedly closed the door.

The woman knocked on the gate a fourth time. This time, Christ himself answered, asking what it was she wished. She replied dispiritedly, "I wanted to ask you, my dear Savior, to let this poor soul into heaven."

Christ answered, "Why, that is Jon – no, my good woman. He did not believe in me." As Jesus tried to close the gate, the enterprising woman threw the pouch containing Jon's soul past the unaware Jesus, ensuring that it flew far into the kingdom of heaven just as the gate slammed shut. The old woman was greatly relieved, knowing that in spite of everything Jon had made it to heaven; she happily returned home.

There is no more to tell, neither of her nor of whatever happened to Jon's soul.

30. Translator's note: This is most likely a reference to Paul's life as Saul of Tarsus. He was a devout Jewish Pharisee and rabbi and thought of Jesus and all Christians as blasphemers of God. He participated in the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr.

Appendix A. Bibliography

"Iceland; or the Journal of a Residence in that Island during the years 1814 and 1815..."; E. Henderson & J. Thorlaksson; Edinburgh, 1819, second (first single-volume) edition (Google books link). A fascinating insight into Icelandic life in the early 19th century.

"The Good People: New Fairylore Essays"; J. Narvaez; University of Kentucky, 1991 (Google books link – excerpts viewable only).

"Legends of Icelandic Magicians"; Translated by Jacqueline Simpson; D.S. Brewer Ltd., and Rowman & Littlefield, 1975 (out of print; library availability only) .

"Scandinavian Changeling Tales"; D. L. Ashliman (viewable online only).

Appendix B. Variation on Saemund the Wise's Escape from the Black School

Translator's notes: Although not in the original version of these tales, I have added another fictional variation of "How Saemund the Wise escaped from the Black School". It appears in a footnote from Benjamin Thorpe's "Edda of Saemund the Learned" (1866) in which Saemund's actual relation Jon (here, "John") Ogmundsson supposedly aids Saemund's escape from the Black School of sorcery. In fact, Saemund did study in Europe and perhaps would have stayed there had Jon not found him and encouraged him to return to Iceland where he later founded a center for literature and studies in Odda.

To ease reading, I have amended a bit of this version by changing the use of present voice ("...the Master at once reads...", "...John continues...", etc.) in Thorpe's version to the narrative past tense ("...the Master read...", "...John continued...").

Sæmund was residing in the south of Europe. He dwelt with a famous Master by whom he was instructed in every kind of lore while on the other hand he forgot (apparently through intense study) all that he had previously learned, even his own name so that when the holy man John Ögmundson came to his abode, he told John that his name was Koll. But on John insisting that he was no other than Sæmund Sigfusson, born at Oddi in Iceland, and relating to him many particulars regarding himself, he at length became conscious of his own identity, and resolved to flee from the place with his kinsman.

For the purpose of deceiving the Master, John continued some time in the place, and often came to visit him and Sæmund 'til at last, one dark night, they betook themselves to flight. No sooner had the Master missed them than he went in pursuit of them; but in vain, and the heavens were too overcast to admit, according to his custom, the reading of their whereabouts in the stars.

So they traveled a day, a night and all the following day. But the following night was clear, and the Master at once read in the stars where

they were, and set out after them at full speed. Then Sæmund, casting his eyes up at the heavens, said, “Now is my Master in chase of us, and sees where we are.” And on John asking what was to be done, he answered, “Take one of my shoes off; fill it with water, and set it on my head.”

John does so, and at the same moment, the Master, looking up at the heavens, says to his companion, “Bad news: the stranger John has drowned my pupil; there is water about his forehead,” and thereupon returned home.

The pair now again prosecute their journey a night and a day; but in the following night, the Master again consults the stars and to his great amazement, he sees the star of Sæmund directly above his head, and so again sets out after the fugitives. Observing this, Sæmund says, “The astrologer is again after us, and again we must look to ourselves: take my shoe off again, and with your knife stab me in the thigh. Fill the shoe with blood and place it on the top of my head.” John does as directed, and the Master again gazing at the stars, says: “There is blood now about the star of Master Koll, and the stranger has for certain murdered him,” and so returns home.

The old man now has once more recourse to his art; but on seeing Sæmund's star shining brightly above him, he exclaims: “My pupil is still living: so much the better. I have taught him more than enough; for he outdoes me both in astrology and in magic. Let them now proceed in safety; I am unable to hinder their departure.”

Appendix C. The Elf Cross

Though not one of the tales in the orignal edition of Avenstrup & Trietel's "Icelandic Fairy and Folktales", I've added this “þjódsaga” or legend called “The Elf Cross” that tells of an artifact existing at the close of the 19th century and said to have come from an elf woman as a token of appreciation and repayment for kindness shown her by an Icelandic farm wife. It was handed down through the generations of the family and is evidenced by the photograph of the actual amulet. It is a tale to be found almost nowhere else in English. The noted Icelandic scholar Dr. Konrad v. Maurer took it from page 96 of an 1898 issue of an Icelandic literary periodical "Eimreiðin" that he republished in the German "Periodical of the Folklore Society" in 1898.

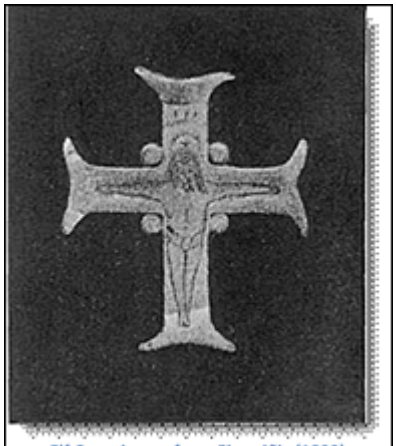
On a farm at Hvassafell[▲] on the Eyjafjörd it happened one day that because of a quickly gathering thunderstorm, a man had to drive a dairy herd home for milking when he found that a cow was missing. In spite of searching, he found nothing. But because bedtime was approaching his wife suggested that they have one of their housemaids stay up and should the cow return home, to have the housemaid milk her into a bucket that she would place in front of the milkhouse door.

That night, the farmer's wife dreamt that a woman dressed in black came to her who said she was an elf queen and complained that her only cow would not give milk and that her husband was deathly ill. She asked the farmer's wife if she would give her the milk in the bucket, leaving it by the milkhouse door and even though it was not full she would be beholden and honor the favor.So the farmer´s wife dreamt that she gave the elf woman the milk without asking any payment in return.

The next morning when she awoke, she remembered the dream and so went to find the bucket empty even though the missing cow had returned and had been milked the night before. For the next few days she saw to it that the cow was milked each evening into the same bucket and that the bucket was set at the same place.

This went on for a full week after which the same woman appeared to the farmer's wife in another dream in which she very gratefully thanked the farmer's wife for the milk and said that she no long required it, that her husband was again healthy and her own cow was again giving milk. At the same time she asked the farmer's wife to accept a small token of her thanks that she would find the next morning in the milk bucket, and told her to

guard them well because they would bring good luck to her and to her offspring.


Elf Cross image from *Eimreiðin* (1899)

In fact, the farmer's wife found in the empty bucket a green dress shawl, a gold ring and a silver cross for which the elf woman had told the wife that the latter should always be passed to the eldest son or the youngest daughter.

While nothing more is known of the fate of the first two gifts, the elf cross was passed from the hand of the woman to her daughter and then on to the last son. It was inherited in direct lineage into the hand of the grandchildren of the farmer's wife who still keep and honor it. The cross, portrayed here as shown in the original Icelandic periodical *Eimreiðin*, bears the likeness of the Crucified One who must have been worshipped by the elves just as by man. Or how else is it that Iceland's elves were accepted in churches, on church grounds, by priests and at Christian services?